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LANDSCAPES OF EXTRACTION: LABOR, BELONGING, AND SOCIAL POLICY

IN NORTHERN CAUCA, COLOMBIA

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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For centuries, alluvial gold extraction and plantation labor have been central sources of income for people living in *Norte del Cauca*. Located in Western Colombia where the Andes open up to the Cauca River Valley, scholars have described this region as a landscape of proletarianization, commoditization, and urbanization. Narratives that oscillate between teleological images of agrarian and urban transition on the one hand, and essentialized views of resistance and autonomy on the other, have long characterized social scientific studies of the region. This dissertation critically examines these narratives and shows how they have foreclosed important political and theoretical debates.

This ethnography is thus not the tale of how enslaved populations became “free peasants” and later plantation and factory workers, or even how they became urban

dwellers as promised in most modernization narratives. Nor is it one where people find their “ancestral” identity and belonging through concerted action against oppressive structures. Drawing on twenty-four months of anthropological fieldwork and archival study conducted between 2011-2016, the dissertation diverges from these views stressing the stories of mutual constitution and often overlapping and ambivalent paths I encountered in this land of gold and sugarcane. There is no doubt that there is little to glorify about the history of colonialism, state formation, and capitalist development in this region. However, I argue that people who are imagined by activists of the black ethnic organizing in Colombia, and the global peasant and environmental movements to be dreaming with alternative forms of political, economic and ecological becoming, are also dreaming with state recognition, infrastructure improvements, entrepreneurial success, and development projects.

Moving along the upper Cauca river with its hydroelectric dam and gold mines, and across the Pan-American highway with its sugarcane plantations and industrial areas, this dissertation develops an analytic of entanglement in order to examine how historically racialized production relations, long-standing extractive practices, and an emergent entrepreneur subjectivities exist alongside “ancestral live-visions” of well-being and autonomy, and notions of “traditional” belonging and production mobilized by small farmers, miners, and rural workers. I argue that what is left of the racialized and extractive labor regimes, is not just a history of proletarianization and destruction of the environment, but also the important experience of people who have sought to belong to the region and have come to know themselves precisely through inhabiting and working these same landscape of exploitation and extraction.

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Usually when you are an inexperienced ethnographer, as I was, you approach people trying to ask them what you consider to be serious questions: land tenure, state effects, discourses of rights and social policies, livelihood and political ecological guarantees, and so on. But I did not come to know *nortecaucanos*, neither did I learn ethnography, by asking people for these kinds of subjects; I learned about them, and about the craft of ethnography, by listening to what they had to say and by paying careful attention to what they were doing, fearing and dreaming. People like Héctor, Bertha, Bernardo and Faviola did not only teach me how to ask, but also reminded me of the importance of historically specific local configurations of social forces and material conditions. Although I owe them such a debt of gratitude sadly, the pseudonyms I used to protect research participants along this dissertation, prevents me from being able to thank them by their names. Besides, I am afraid that as I have taken our conversations by fragments and rearranged them into other contexts and discussions, sometimes fixing their meanings or forcing their coexistence, they would not always recognize themselves in these pages. Yet I hope the women and men who shared their stories with me could find in this text a space for imagination and exploration instead than a simple representation. To all the people in Mindala, La Toma, Suárez, Buenos Aires, Santander de Quilichao, Guachené, Villarica and Padilla who shared with me their wisdom and precious time than you. Muchas gracias.

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I did fieldwork and began writing up while being a member of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences in Icesi University. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues in Cali for their support and for the conversations, classes, and fieldtrips that I was able to materialize with their help. Among the many colleagues to thank Inge Helena Valencia, Carlos Duarte, Alhena Caicedo, Diego Cagüañas, Luis Fernando Barón and Jaime Eduardo Londoño deserve particular mention. The initial parts of the fieldwork I undertook for this dissertation were made possible by the support of the Bigel Endowment Award for Graduate Research in Anthropology, and the Pre-dissertation and special Opportunity award, both from Rutgers University. In Cali, the CIES (Centro de Estudios Interdisciplinarios, Jurídicos, Sociales y Humanistas) and the Ethnographic Laboratory of the Anthropology program at Icesi University made possible the rest of the fieldwork. Karime Rios and *La Sociedad de Las Letras* assisted me with the transcription of so many interviews and contributed many ideas on how to write the stories on this work. To the students at Icesi who accompanied me in many fieldtrips and who carried out censuses, my gratitude for your work and curiosity, especially to Pedro, Luis and Natalia Medina. To the students of master's seminar on *Miradas Antropológicas al Suroccidente* at Universidad del Cauca thank you for allowing me to think together and for expanding my memories of Santander de Quilichao.

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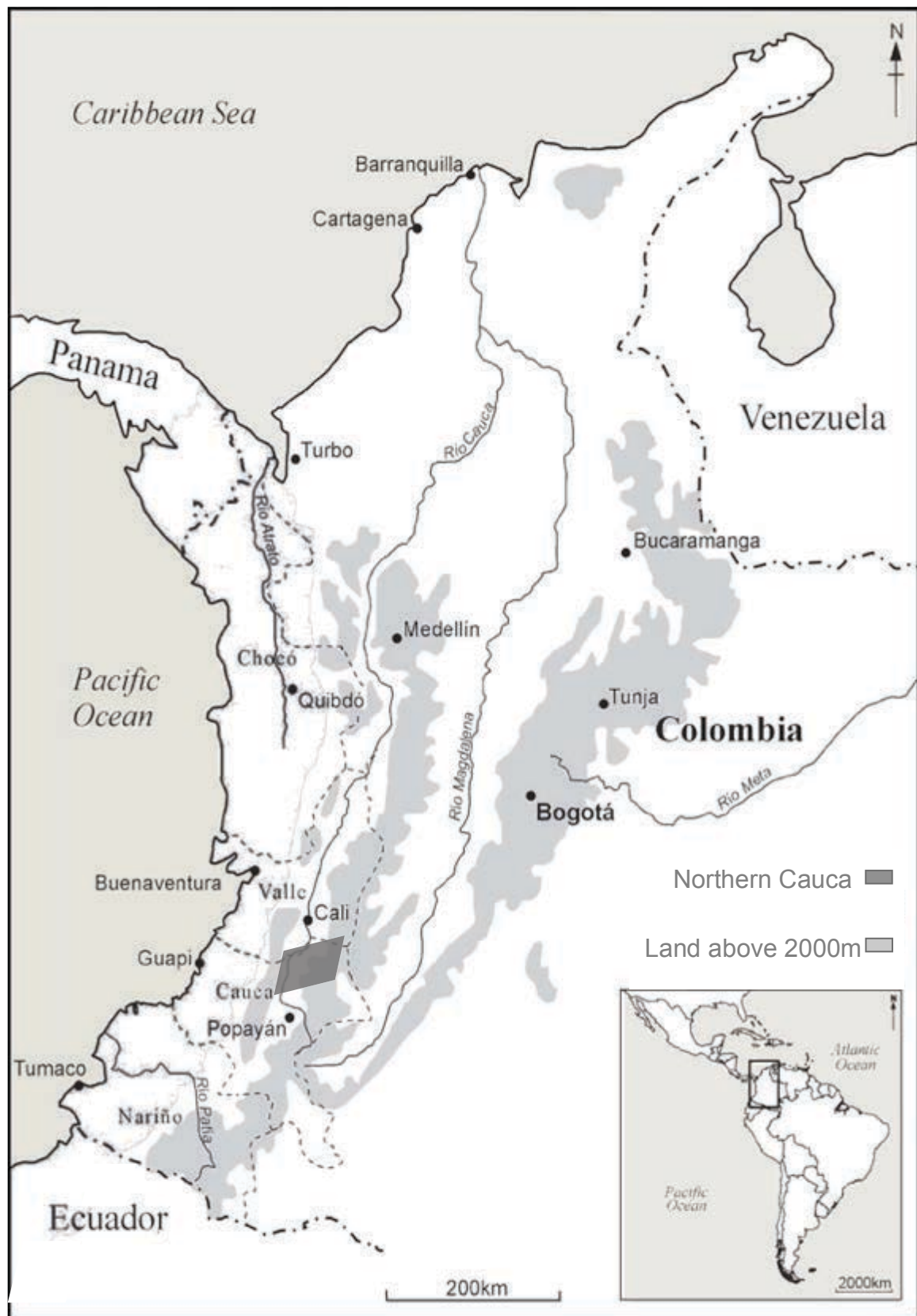
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ABBREVIATIONS

AC - Archivo del Congreso (Bogotá)
ACC - Archivo Central del Cauca (Popayán)
ACONC - Association of Community Councils of Northern Cauca
AGN - Archivo General de la Nación (Bogotá)
AGI - Archivo General de Indias (Sevilla Spain)
APFFV - Archivo del Patrimonio Fotográfico y Fílmico del Valle (Cali)
ANUC - National Association of Peasant Users
CVC – Corporación Autónoma Regional de Valle
CRC - Corporación Autónoma Regional del Cauca
CRIC - Cauca Regional Indigenous Council
CIAT – International Center for Tropical Agriculture (Palmira and Santander)
DANE – Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Bogotá)
EMCODES - Cooperation for Development Company
FARC – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
IBRD - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICANH – Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia (Bogotá)
ILO - International Labor Organization Convention No.169
INCORA - Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria (Bogotá)
INCODER - Colombian Institute of Rural Development
JAC - Juntas de Acción Comunal
PCN – Proceso de Comunidades Negras
RED - La Red de Organizaciones de base (Norte del Cauca)
RF - Rockefeller Archive Center, New York
TVA - Tennessee Valley Authority



Map 1. Map of Colombia. Source: Oslender (2004), modified by the author to show the area of study

Introduction

“I had never seen the ocean before,” said Marcos, a young black activist from the southwestern Andean part of Colombia known as *Norte del Cauca* (see Map 1). “The sea was rough, and it was full of litter and logs. The Pacific is not that peaceful, you know? It was not like the pictures you see in magazines. There were more *manglares* [mangrove swamp] than beaches, but I like it though. Still, I cannot forget the way I felt when I was there,” he said.

Marcos paused dramatically, but he couldn’t hide a smile that presaged a sudden change of genre: “We were eating at a restaurant in the port of Buenaventura, and I noticed with disgust the amount of salt in the food. To shoot the breeze, I asked how people didn’t get sick eating so salty. Immediately, my *costeño* [coastal] hosts mocked me, calling me *negro de aguadulce* [freshwater black].” The room full of black Andean social leaders erupted in laughter. Marcos enjoyed the moment and the attention, but raised his voice trying to finish his story: “Listen, black leaders from the coastal region said that they were stronger than us living in the interior valleys. They argued that since the Pan-American Highway ran across our territories we lost our identity,” Marcos said now with a gesture of annoyance. Later that afternoon he told me: “This episode keeps returning to me every time I ask myself why we don’t have the same recognition and rights as black people from the Pacific Ocean?”

Beginnings

Marcos was articulating a general feeling when he spoke these words half way to one of the innumerable rights activist workshops that has attempted to address the limited character of state endorsed multicultural rights in Colombia. He and thirty people more had spent the weekend sketching a map of the location of towns and significant places in the northern Cauca region. It was not the first time that local black leaders participated in a workshop to map their territories, but it was the first time that they were trying to do it altogether; as a block of inter-Andean “black communities.”¹

Located where the Andes open up to the Cauca River Valley, in the southwest of the country, the northern Cauca area has been mostly inhabited by small farmers, miners, and rural workers, all descendants from enslaved populations and exploited classes working in *haciendas* and mining camps not altogether bygone in the region. Currently *nortecaucanos* demonstrate a temporal coexistence of diverse modes of subsistence and a complex range of residential strategies between neighboring municipalities and urban centers nearby. Most combine small family farming and mining, with intermittent involvements in economies based on urban services, industrial manufacturing, commercial cattle farming, and cash crop agriculture. This dissertation is an ethnographic and historiographic exploration of the ground and outcome of livelihood struggles and affective engagements with such landscapes and histories of exploitation. A central point of this dissertation is how these racialized experiences of extraction and labor regimes have interacted with forms of belonging shaping each other in uneven and paradoxical ways. It asks how material histories of exploitation have become powerful sites of

attachment and feelings, and what politics or possible grounds for action are enabled, reproduced or foreclosed by these articulations.

My initial ideas for this dissertation came out of a series of collaborative efforts that took the “racialized geography,” expressed by Marcos above, to be a main concern for a team of university-based social scientists, lawyers, and geographers. In 2010, a year before traveling to the United States to initiate my graduate studies, a sociologist friend and colleague had invited me to participate in a project in alliance with an observatory in the capital city of Bogotá, whose mission was to support territorial claims of rural and ethnic communities in the country.² Inspired by the promise of collective land titles to “black communities” contained in the current Colombian Constitution (1991), we developed an interdisciplinary approach orientated towards understanding and buttressing social organizations in *Norte del Cauca*. In collaboration with local participants we defined the content and scope of an “action-research” program that could accompany social organizations in their search for land rights, naming it *Herramientas par a la Autonomía Territorial* (Tools for Territorial Autonomy).

Beyond the conventional image that associated black people in Colombia and some Latin American countries with coastal regions (Walsh, et.al 2005, Greene 2007, Wade 2012), the project intended to countermap these representations by ethnographically substantiating their largely neglected presence in zones of high economic priority like the inter-Andean valleys. Given this context, the “action-research” program was also designed as an opportunity to counter and engage in discussions with the legal category of “black communities,” constrained by the statute books to “barren lands in rural areas along the rivers of the Pacific Basin, in accordance with their

traditional production practices, [and] to their collective property.” And defined as: “the group of families of Afro-Colombian descent who possesses its own culture, shares a common history and has its own traditions and customs within a rural-urban setting and which reveals and preserves a consciousness of identity that distinguishes it from other ethnic group” (Law of Black Communities, Law 70 of 1993).³

From the onset, the idea of “rural areas along the rivers of the Pacific Basin” was seen by some factions of the Afro-Colombian mobilization as a way to limit the applicability of this law to other parts of the country.⁴ In fact, Marcos words echoed a general feeling of discontent with how the “black community” in Colombia had been imagined by policy makers, as well as with mainstream black political organization and activism in the country. The focus on the river-crossed terrain of the Pacific rain forest and the emphasis on cultural and ethnic radical difference played down their modern and interconnected experiences. Besides, social leaders like Marcos often claimed that the Pacific coast did not have the majority of “Afrodescendants” in Colombia. Indeed, according to the results of the 2005 census most self-identified Afro-Colombians — bearing in mind the indeterminacy of that category (Barbary and Urrea 2004) — lived in the metropolitan areas of the interior of the country (DANE 2006: 20).⁵ Although the census categories and numbers are always contested, the density of black population in the cities of the Andean region such as Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá, and in medium cities on the Caribbean coast like Barranquilla and Cartagena surpassed that of the Pacific coast. Furthermore, “barren lands” as the Law required for land titling, were perhaps only present in those peripheral areas where the development project had not succeeded in establishing its regime. In this regard, despite the apparent advance of rights, the limited

character of Law 70 seemed to reify a “savage slot,” to paraphrase Trouillot (2003:7-28), that preserved the long-standing monopoly of land tenure and natural resources throughout the interior of the country. As several scholars have shown, blackness became not only ruralized and constrained to the Pacific coastal region, but also became indigenized prioritizing ethnic difference over other possible articulations (Hooker 2005, Ng’weno 2007, Wade 1995, 2012, Asher 2009, Restrepo 2002).

However, this situation was not the product of a single conjuncture or expert discourse. Rather it is a process with a multiple genealogies, each one of them product of complex interactions between numerous actors with different priorities and positions of power. Before the National Constituent Assembly of 1991, there was an extended idea among state agents, academics, and cultural activists, that territory, identity, and culture constituted automatically a coherent and localized unit.⁶ Despite academic critics that emerged in anthropology with the globalization debates of the 1990s (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson 1992), such conceptions were still deeply rooted operating in the legislation and local knowledge production —mainly anthropological— about indigenous populations since the mid-twentieth century. In consequence, when discussing the possibilities of recognition for other long-marginalized groups, it was not surprising that the idea of “traditional” forms of belonging and production, as well as the insistence on cultural difference, became a precondition for aspiring to this new multicultural legal status. One of the emergent black organizations based in the Pacific region, *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), defined their commitment to this “right to difference” as a strategy that had more “audience” and “effectiveness,” than ideas of racial discrimination (Pedrosa 1996:251).

The engagement component for the project seemed in 2010 even more pressing due to the increasing interest of foreign mining companies, sugarcane industry, and newly emplaced Industrial Parks on the mineral, energy, and labor resources of the area. Special laws and transnational deals were transforming this specific part of the valley into a target of neoliberal economic projects, securing access to labor force and natural resources. Since the 1991, a privatization agenda, strongly pressured by the state's debt and global "structural adjustment" policies, liberalized in Colombia the energy generation business and the gold markets, as well as offered tax benefits and free trade zones to companies who setup installations in the area (e.g. special law Paéz of 1995, see Chapter 3). Moreover, between 2002 and 2010 former president Alvaro Uribe, encouraged multinational corporations and international traders to enter Colombia's mining sector, dropping taxes and making mining an attractive prospect for investors. During that period, the number of hectares with mining concessions increased eightfold, from 1.13 million to 8.53 million, almost 4 percent of the Colombian territory (Armeni 2011). Along these economic measures, a well-planned and selective strategy of militarized governance was enforced by a series of decrees that declared a "state of internal unrest."⁷ All around the country, and especially in some rural areas in conflict and with a historical lack of state presence—including the northern Cauca region—the so-called "rehabilitation and consolidation zones," later labeled "security and development" zones, instituted a state of exception in order to "control public order." Backed since 2004 by a multibillion-dollar U.S. support, the "consolidation" plan became the conceptual successor to Plan Colombia; the counter-drug and counterterrorist strategy that transformed Colombia in 2000 into the largest recipient of U.S. security assistance,

outside the Middle East and Afghanistan.⁸ According to Fanny, a social leader I talked to at the beginning of my fieldwork, “everything was now open for concession contracts; doesn’t matter whether it is minerals, land, or water. Everything is for sale, and the conflict is part of the deal to take us out of here,” said the social leader, while acknowledging that she was *amenazada de muerte* [threatened with death] for supposedly opposing “development.” For her, as for many other leaders, the increase of regional militarization and the arrival of paramilitary groups in 2000s were associated with foreign investment and the expansion of privatization processes and industrial interests.

My starting-point for this dissertation was in many ways then shaped by this historic crossroads described above. I left Colombia for graduate studies in the midst of the project, but my prior involvement gave me a glimpse into *Nortecaucano*’s dilemmas and struggles, and served as a concrete site for developing a stronger reflexive and critical attitude towards the political nature of anthropological work. In fact, since many social leaders around the region were making similar connections to those expressed by Fanny, I understood that for my dissertation research it was necessary to continue with the engagement component started since 2010.⁹ I saw it as an opportunity to maintain a collaborative stance useful to the people in their struggles, while at the same time yielding valuable scholarly insights for understanding how these histories of extraction and labor regimes interacted with forms of belonging and territorial claims shaping each other in uneven and paradoxical ways.

Discourses of rights and social policies

When I started writing my proposal in 2011, Colombia like many other Latin American countries was already well into the 1990s “multicultural turn.”¹⁰ Since my initial visits

that year, I witnessed how *Nortecaucanos*' identifications, politics, and economies were rapidly changing in the context of new forms of rights claims, neoliberal development, and transnationally attuned meanings attributed to "blackness." The political landscape under which long-marginalized peoples traditionally framed their demands to the state or their interaction with other local, regional, and international actors was definitely being transformed and, whether I liked or not, I was also part of that process. Despite my efforts to uphold a stance of "cultural critique," and contest hegemonic notions of "black community," since my previous engagement I was undoubtedly strengthening certain activist factions and providing the means and the techniques for new articulations of ethnicity difficult to predict.

Just as happened to rural blacks in the Pacific coastal region in the mid 1990s, people in *Norte del Cauca* were experiencing these legal, economic and political changes with great anxieties, but perhaps with a particular inflection. The "Afro-Colombian identity," based in the Pacific coastal region, represented to some *Nortecaucanos*, as Marcos, an aspirational model that most of the time was impossible to fulfill (Ng'weno 2007, Ararat et. al. 2013). As Povinelli (2002) noted for the case of Australian multiculturalism, the condition of authenticity was in many ways felt as a new form of domination. This time not only exercised by dominant sectors of society, but also by social leaders, activists, and intellectuals.

As this dissertation will show, before the array of legislation aimed at Afro-descendant people in 1990s, rural black populations in northern Cauca—as in other parts of the country—did not position themselves so undoubtedly within the narratives about an African collective memory or ethnic origin (Losonczy 1997:354, Restrepo 1997:302,

Ng'weno 2007:79-83). Although “black history” and “culture” were sometimes promoted by early social organizations (e.g. Black cultural congress in Cali, see Chapter 4), previous strategies were more related to what Anne Marie Losonczy has called for the Pacific costal region “violent historical discontinuities” that brought together diverse elements in open and fluid boundaries (Losonczy 1997, 2006).¹¹ For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s black and indigenous groups in the *Norte del Cauca* aligned with the cause of social rights of peasants to land (see Chapter 4). Together these groups were pushing an agrarian reform through land occupations and participation in the National Association of Peasant producers (ANUC). Only with the expectations of inclusion in Law 70 (1993), people began to employ new political and economic strategies. This context, aided by legally binding international instruments and the interest in “Afro-Latinos” on the part of development institutions, placed some local activists in *Norte del Cauca* at the crossroad to reframe their struggles under the flags of ethnicity.¹²

However, I also encountered more suspicious leaders and inhabitants that were not even interested in expanding these rights. Almost as if they were anticipating academic theories about a sophisticated conjuncture of neoliberalism and multicultural discourses, that suited the state’s development agendas (Hale 2005, 2011), they preferred to contest those same categories of radical difference pursuing their own pathways to social and economic justice.¹³ For some of them, as I will detail in subsequent chapters, what was left of the long lasting extractive labor regimes in the region, and the contemporary state categorizations aimed at both managing populations and territories, was not a history that could be reduced to proletarianization and ethnicization processes. For them, what was left was mainly the experience of people who have sought to belong to

the region and have come to know themselves precisely through inhabiting and working these same racialized geographies and landscapes of exploitation.¹⁴

Therefore, I was definitely concerned about reproducing and reinforcing the essentializing distinctions of the state-endorse “multiculturalist” discourse and its underlying anodyne notion of “cultural diversity.” Yet, at the same time, I knew from previous experiences that long-marginalized groups often obtained better results from this kind of ‘strategic essentialism’ (e.g. Spivak 1987), than by claiming other forms of citizenship. At first, this tension puzzled me. Precisely when a number of social movements were pointing to the necessity of “occupying” these problematic constructions of “otherness” —in terms of both identifications and territorialities—, a dominant segment of social theory was also turning its back on these petitions with an unmitigated cosmopolitanism and a radical deconstructionism. I was far from finding either a political or a theoretical solution, but I began to understand it not as an obstacle or a contradiction, but as a constitutive and relational character of the practice of anthropology and of the process of articulation through which statements on the “state” and “identities” were produced.

The question I became more preoccupied with and which drove part of the proposal, was how shifting the dialogue from claims of social equality to claims of ethnic and cultural difference fixed, divided, and enclosed populations within the law and within specific state geographies —both physical and symbolic. Despite considering these shifts towards official “multiculturalism,” an important achievement for some social movements, there were, indeed, critical voices suggesting that this spread of rights negotiations across the subcontinent had strong connections with neoliberal doctrines and

nation building ideologies (Hale 2002, Wade 1999, Gros 2000). These scholars contended that these new configurations of state-endorsed “multicultural” reforms required anthropologists to analyze the relationships between racialization, spatially differentiated rule and citizenship.

The anthropological literature about these new ethnic configurations and reforms that were taking place in the region, as in many other contexts, was abundant and growing rapidly in the 2000s. Studies reflected the same ambivalence I encountered. Most fluctuated between arguments that emphasized the agency of marginalized groups and the political possibilities of these legal reforms, and others that highlighted their limited character and contradictions as a means to advance state agendas or neoliberal interests.¹⁵ On the one hand, given the long-standing colonial architectures of power that helped to create and sustain exclusionary republics all along the region, an early group of US scholars embraced an optimistic perspective about this type of political struggle for rights (Sieder 2002, Van Cott 2000). In Colombia, academics concerned with the “invisibility” of black people, in terms of the representations of the nation popular culture, also saw these changes as an achievement of ethnic minority movements (Arocha 1998, 1999, Friedemann 1993). For these scholars, the idea of “black community” as an ethnic group was not being actively produced by the progressive church, the new social movements, or the state; on the contrary, its existence and African origins were finally being recognized by these reforms.¹⁶

Subsequent debates began to analyze this emergence of ethnicity not as a self-evident fact, but as complex cultural and political constructions that could serve the strategies of resistance of marginalized groups. In fact, there were scholars who related

this new regime of representation to counter-hegemonic and subaltern social movements where alternative notions of development and modernity were being imagine and put to the test (Escobar 2008, Santos 2010). Seen under this light, the process was not a top-down implementation, but the outcome of interaction and constant negotiation between experts, organizations, activists, state officials and local groups. Later on, even scholars who focused on the contradictory effects of a sort of “neoliberal multiculturalism,” also insisted on the importance of attending to local forms of appropriation and contestation (Hale 2005, Postero 2013, Speed 2005). Sometimes these regimes, as in the case of Nicaragua or Brazil, opened potentially productive inter-ethnic alliances among groups that experienced violence and exclusion (Gordon and Hale 2003, French 2009). In other regions, it also opened multiple options of identifications as in the case of Honduras (Anderson 2009). In this sense, multiculturalist arguments were not necessarily understood as straitjacket with permanent meanings, but were seen as a contested field of cultural politics (Alvarez et.al. 1998). Hoffmann, for instance noted for the case of Colombia “a reorientation of the ethnic debate towards the anti-discrimination struggle” (Hoffmann in Wade 2007:13). In turn, these practices and claims began to be seen not only against the local power relations within which those attributions were made, but also in the context of how images and objects attributed to “black culture” travel and how different racial articulation were imagined, circulated, and negotiated transnationally (Dzidzienyo & Oboler 2005, Sansone 2003, Yelvington 2003).

On the other hand, less enthusiastic scholars commented that Latin American official “multiculturalism,” albeit highly heterogeneous, was not necessarily counter-hegemonic. To be sure, it’s making raised as many troubling issues as it claims to solve.

From start a group of academics that studied ideas of “racial democracy” insisted on how multiculturalist policies maintained strong ties with discourses and practices of *mestizaje* [race mixture] as a civilizing and nation-building ideology (Hale 2002, Wade 2006).¹⁷ Growing out of these connections, some researchers asked what those kinds of claims could tell us about the form and function of Latin American states and about modern states in general? In fact, regardless of the limited achievements of these legal claims, it was difficult to deny that these categorizations —specifically in regards to ethnicity, autonomy and territory— had an essential role in restructuring state processes and practices (Ng’weno 2007). From this perspective it became possible to argue that such claims and recognitions had powerful state effects. They demanded marginalized populations and subjects to think and operate under the social, political and juridical categories of the state. In fact, while some of these movements —whether indigenous or afro-descendants— were responsible for most of the decision-making regarding activist campaigns, rights defense work, rallies, and marches, ironically they could also be in many ways local expressions of the state (Martinez 2013), or at least a product of sort of “indirect rule” (Gros 2000). Thus, It was not only that the functions and the internal administrative body of these organizations were delimited by national government ruling; it was also that despite the new commitment to a set of democratic and participative values they acted in the ground following old-style politics (Agudelo 2005).

Moreover, for cases like Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala researchers found that when combined with neoliberal economic reforms and structural adjustment plans these policies could easily become instruments for managing populations and governing areas in which state control is relatively weak (Hale 2002, 2005, Speed 2005, Gledhill 2004,

Gros 1997, 2000). Much more than a simple functionalist reading, these critiques were in fact part of a larger argument regarding the conjunction of rights talks with international doctrines of “good governance,” “development,” and “democracy.” From this perceptive, one point of argument was how these rules and related human rights instruments rendered “Third World” states vulnerable to international law (Merry 2011, Scott 2012, Speed 2006).

Similarly, framing claims under the categories of the state-endorsed “multiculturalism” began to be seen as a process that could co-opt alternative ways of demanding political and social justice (Brown and Halley 2002, Pardo 2002, Rodriguez 2012, Sieder, Angell and Schjolden 2005); a sort of “legalization of politics” already known in other postcolonial contexts (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). Other scholars criticized these kinds of policies as a part of long-term process of silencing race and racism in the region (Goldberg 2009), whereas opposing analyses suggested that divided politically subordinate groups distracting attention from more basic issues of class inequality (Winant 1993).

Finally, attention was drawn also to the relationship between spatiality and power involved in the promise of multiculturalist reforms. In this respect, the Peruvian and Colombian cases were noteworthy, as these states have not only “ordered” geographically it’s multicultural subjects, but also have established a sort of hierarchy within the multiculturalist imagination (Greene 2007, Cairo 2011, Rincón 2009, Rojas 2012, Bocarejo 2012). The new Bolivian constitution, as Daniel Goldstein described it, was salient too because its “frequent invocation of original indigenous peasant peoples and customs as the plurination’s new leading edge is the clearest expression of the nation-

state's racio ("indigenous") –spatio ("peasant") –temporal ("original") ideology" (Goldstein 2012:170). In all these normative senses, the once promising reforms of the multicultural turn could actually become, as Stuart Hall insisted, indistinguishable from "a spook lookalike of Apartheid logic" (Maharaj in Hall 2000:211). There certainly were cases in which this eruption of limited rights ironically coincided with the intensification of armed conflicts, along with the appearance of paramilitary groups, processes of displacement and new security discourses and practices (Goldstein 2010:494-495, Oslender 2007).

While inspired by this sustained tension between approaches that privileged a hopeful perspective about this type of political struggle for rights, and others that emphasized its role in the production of new forms of power over old inequalities, I set myself to the task of finding ways to ethnographically illuminate the mutually constitutive character of the two extremes without disregarding their most valued findings. There was here more than a faint echo of the structure-agency debate. Despite the contentious positions, there was an increasing recognition among scholars that conceptions and experiences of rights and ethnic identifications were not ready-made, nor exhausted by hegemonic meanings (Escobar 2008, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Restrepo 2008). Instead of reifying the state as an external actor localized above political actions and cultural practices (a stance particularly common in the study of the relations of indigenous people to the state in Latin America), researchers were becoming increasingly interested in challenging the presumed separation and opposition between 'civil society' and the 'state,' and replacing it by multiple, shifting, and intricate kinds of everyday practices and political processes (Alvarez 2002, Martínez 2013). In some of

these models the mediations and effects on people's lives were far from controlled by direct interventions. To be sure, contemporary ethnographic studies were showing how in their circulation and constant mutation, rights discourses articulate with local practices and cultural understandings destabilizing hegemonic assumptions about autonomy, race, nature, gender, violence, security, victimhood and reparation (Cárdenas 2012, Goldstein 2012, Goodale 2002, Hodgson 2002, 2011, Nelson 2009, Speed and Collier 2000, Vera 2017). Tracing the ambiguities of how locally specific meanings of "rights," "ethnicity," and "blackness" traveled across national contexts and became inscribed in practices of governance, aspired as modes of subjectification, and challenged in particular cultural politics appeared more appropriate for the context that I was facing.

Indeed, after more than 20 years of the implementation of these liberal rights, the consequences on the ground were demanding scholars to develop a different take on these issues. There was a special need for detailed and comparative studies of how representational politics within multiculturalist reforms were working out in practice in the local and historical contexts of Latin American national formations. This was not only an issue of recognizing different forms of "actual existing" multiculturalism, but also taking into account the different ways of incorporating these new regimes into what Peter Wade refers to as "structures of alterity" (Wade 2010:37).

Blacks and Indians have both been characterized as Others, located in the liminal spaces of the nation, but they have fitted in different ways into what I call the structures of alterity. The apparent 'invisibility' of black people in Colombia, for example, has not been due to a simple process of discrimination -Indians have, if anything, suffered even greater discrimination- but due to the precise mode of their insertion into the structures of alterity. They have not been institutionalized as Others in the same way that Indians have (Wade 1997: 36-37).

Latin American anthropologists were thinking similarly. Rita Laura Segato and Claudia Briones had insisted in the importance of attending to national constructions or “historical formations of alterity” (Segato 2007:37-69, Briones 2005). Either “structures of alterity” or “particular histories,” both played a central role in understanding the question of the production of “internal others” in nation-building processes. That is, in the modes of production and management of local boundaries of difference, and in the conditions of identification and existence of that difference. When this broader othering process is taken into account multiculturalist rights are just but one episode, one singular configuration, in the larger process of political and discursive re-localization of difference since colonial times.

Building on Michel Foucault’s eventalizing procedure and on the category of problematization, the Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo (2008, 2013) attempts precisely to show the limits of “racialism” and “ethnicism” as principles of historical intelligibility. By relocating arguments ‘for’ or ‘against’ the politics of ethnicity and social movements in Colombia and Latin America in a broader field of “games of truth” associated with certain modalities of power, Restrepo is able to “capture different ‘articulations of blackness’ in their positivity, singularity and dispersion,” while at the same time avoiding “perspectives that subsume blackness in any sort of transcendental racial or ethnic subject” (Restrepo 2008:380). For Restrepo the articulation of ethnicity in the politics of blackness, in the Pacific costal region of Colombia, implied a crucial rupture with previous articulations involving discursive and institutional practices that demanded a straightforward “pedagogy of alterity” (Restrepo 2001).

In very similar ways, I was also starting to feel unease and trying to distance

myself from the contradictory effects of these modalities of “rights and ethnic talk.” No doubt, in making this turn, I am deeply indebted to those cited above who have shown the problematic ways in which many studies on black people in Colombia, were not only reading the present into the past, but also were establishing a closure where all experiences of alterity were being translated into “identity politics.” Thus, I became convinced that this region and their inhabitants required more than purely political or purely scientific answers. Rather than finding a middle ground that remained attentive to both constraining and enabling conditions of this struggle for rights, less than debating about the primacy of class over ethnicity, or less than simply provincializing governmentality approaches, I became convinced, as I will show next, that my research process had to start in a different place.

Returning instead of arriving

When talking to Faviola, a social leader from *Mindala*, about the uneasiness I had with the “rights and ethnic talk,” she said to me: “We have been living here for centuries, but suddenly now everybody is interested in us. I feel as if we have been turned into some sort of specimen. People are coming, and they are looking at us differently. They are asking lots of questions: *How was life here before the dam, or before multinationals? Did we have a particular sense of territory? What were our traditions and customs? Did we hunt? Did we fish? Did we have traditional farms?* They are writing books and shooting documentaries. At times I wonder if this is all worth it, or perhaps if this is actually part of the problem?” she said emphatically.

Listening to her, I realized that I could quickly end up doing the same. I could end up writing the same type of papers and reports as the other researchers I met there. I

could easily have replicated the narratives of how former enslaved populations became “free peasants,” and later rural wage laborers, or even how they became “ethnic communities” as part of a shared historical experience. I could have written an ethnography showing how people found their “ancestral” identity and belonging through concerted action against oppressive structures. Or how the imposition of structural adjustment policies and strategic calculations of elite groups, align with the “global capital,” dispossessed them from their land as a necessary step towards industrialization, urbanization, and accumulation (e.g. Vélez and Varela 2014, Caicedo 2017). Or writing in more refined terms; I could have ended up thinking about these processes as the sole consequence of “governmentality” or even “necropolitics.”

In fact, when I returned to the region in 2014 to conduct fieldwork in *Norte del Cauca*, I found that the places I had previously visited, had become a “hotspot” for political activism and engaged social research. In 2013, a national agrarian strike, which grew out of protests against free-trade agreements, enhanced struggles driving lots of attention to rural areas of the country like northern Cauca. In addition, with peace treaties between the guerrilla group FARC and the Colombian government on the horizon, different institutions and organizations were looking at this area as a unique social laboratory.

During the first few months of my fieldwork for this dissertation, that I spent renewing contacts and revisiting sites in *Norte del Cauca*, the number of social scientists, experts and NGO workers intervening and documenting in the area took me slightly aback. Their actions ranged from meetings and workshops promoting a rights-based approach to development, to studies and short documentaries about ethnicity, territorial

self-determination, land grabbing and natural resource governance. Despite differences in concerns and approaches I felt that most of these researchers were taking for granted ethnic and territorial narratives. Or at least, contrary to what Faviola suspected, they were assuming that those categories were not themselves “part of the problem.” They were all asking similar questions. Some were talking about the faults and the retrenchment of the “multiculturalist state,” others about people being deceived by Afro-descendant and indigenous collective rights. Others were echoing concerns about the return of extractive regimes and the arrival of a global rush for land, endorsing romantic tales of resistance and imagining post-development forms of contestation.

One of the many activists and supporters I met along these journeys through the mountains framed the problem in the following terms:

Multinationals and extractive industries are dispossessing people from their ethnic territories and are contaminating their rivers and soil. Communities are losing their traditional practices and values. That is why we need to work on defending the right to prior consultation and on ancestral ideas of development and autonomy (personal communication 2015).

From my previous experience, I recognized that all these kinds of engagements and all that amount of research that was being carried out was well intentioned and relevant. I knew these problems were all very much true. Of course, there was no doubt that people were facing a period of far reaching changes. And in many ways, as many other scholars, my hopes were that qualitative research could eventually be put to a use that could improve the conditions of people’s lives. The problem I had with these interventions — including my own— is that in the best-case scenario we were all falling into the techniques of invention and forms of visualization that Restrepo (2008a) described in the process of ethnicization of the “black community:”

The techniques involved in the invention of blackness as an ethnic group have been multiple—they range from meetings to workshops, from assemblies to departmental (and national) commissions, from ethnic organizations to the program or institutional components, from legislation to projects as mechanisms of interaction with the state and NGO's. They have involved forms of visualization through maps, censuses, documents and surveys. They have been put in operation by an army of experts—from activists and governmental officers to the advisers and academics. In their interaction, these techniques and forms of visualization constituted the most profound apparatus through which the black community has been produced and reproduced as ethnic group. In their apparent neutrality, rationality and objectivity, in their silent labor of assembling, registering and reporting, they have displayed one of the most powerful components of the politics of ethnicity (Restrepo 2008a:105).

But, others were perhaps more compromised assuming a narrative and a battery of concepts that seemed to explain many situations without necessarily conducting fieldwork. Expressions like “dispossession” and “ethnic territories,” presupposed the idea of pre-constituted subjects with fixed attributes, localities, and teleologies. The terms were certainly useful and allowed many researchers to realize how capitalism continued to create particular geographies of inequality and particular sets of “others,” but in some way when combined these terms told always the same stories.¹⁸ Whereas the case could be made for a sort of “accumulation by dispossession,” of the kind Harvey described (2003:144), the process through which small farmers and miners gained, lost and in some cases maintained control over resources and land in this region was far more complex.¹⁹ Certainly, the modes of land acquisition by outsiders have involved in many cases strategies that would classify as “land grabbing,” making it difficult to resist the temptation to write “history” as the working out of a more or less logical sequence of moments structured by capital. But, considering the approximately three centuries of colonial rule and enslaved labor against the 50-80 years of “free peasantry,” we should perhaps follow Gillian Hart’s advice and “delink the land question from agriculture and

from individual restitution claims, and to re-articulate it in terms of racialized dispossession as an ongoing process” (Hart 2006:991). This move, as she insists, along with stressing the need on basic social security grounded in citizenship rights, holds out the possibility for linking struggles in multiple arenas, re-articulating race and class, or extending claims across the rural-urban divide (Hart 2002, 2006).

While scholars studying these issues in Latin America were making critical contribution depicting the effects of a sort of “neoliberal governmentality,” very few researchers I met in those initial months were actually trying to investigate it ethnographically, much less trying to understand their own role as experts in those processes.²⁰ Concerned as I was with resisting the idea that all these shifting relations of people to the modern state —through changes in labor, land tenure, and categorization of populations—, were always and everywhere projects of domination, or simply the echoes of forces at play in transnational arenas, I sought to contrast these representations by mapping ethnographically and historically specific local configurations of social forces and material conditions, but also the politics and visceral meanings of such processes. My premise was to comprehend how people who were imagined by activists of the black ethnic organizing in Colombia, and by the global peasant and environmental movements, to be dreaming with alternative forms of political, economic, and ecological becoming, were also dreaming about state recognition, infrastructure improvements, entrepreneurial success, and access to development projects.

However, as soon as I arrived in northern Cauca, I got involved in two different ventures that although facilitated me to renew ethnographic engagement, made me part of the same entanglement I pretended to comprehend. First, between October 2014 and

November 2015, I was asked by two nascent “Black Community Councils,” in the highland areas of Suárez, to assist them gathering census data and local oral histories of the jurisdictions of Meseta and Mindala (See Figure 1). These social organizations needed the information to substantiate their territorial claims and to demand constitutional protection as afro-descendent groups. Specifically, in the case of Mindala these kinds of “evidences” were urgent for negotiating compensations for the upheaval they had experienced when in 1985 the Colombian government and local elites decided to build a vast hydroelectric dam and artificial lake (See Chapter 4), but they were also becoming key pieces in the differential aid programs for Afro-Colombian internal displaced people. While conducting censuses and oral history interviews, I visited about sixty homesteads scattered way along the country hill of Suárez in the southwest corner of the Cauca Valley.

During November 2015, a parallel engagement led me to accompany, with informal video recordings, a women’s movement that marched from their small town of *La Toma*, in the mountain slopes of Suárez, to the capital city of Colombia. This was a 350-mile march to defend, in their own words, “their Ancestral Territories” against heavy machinery excavators and the armed groups often behind these mining enterprises. While many *nortecaucanos* have pan-mined for gold in the surrounding rivers, since enslaved populations were brought to the region around 1500s, their mining activities were often deemed illegal by authorities, lumped into the same category as the armed groups’ operations. Meanwhile, large multinational mining operations were being granted concessions, tax breaks, and high royalties.



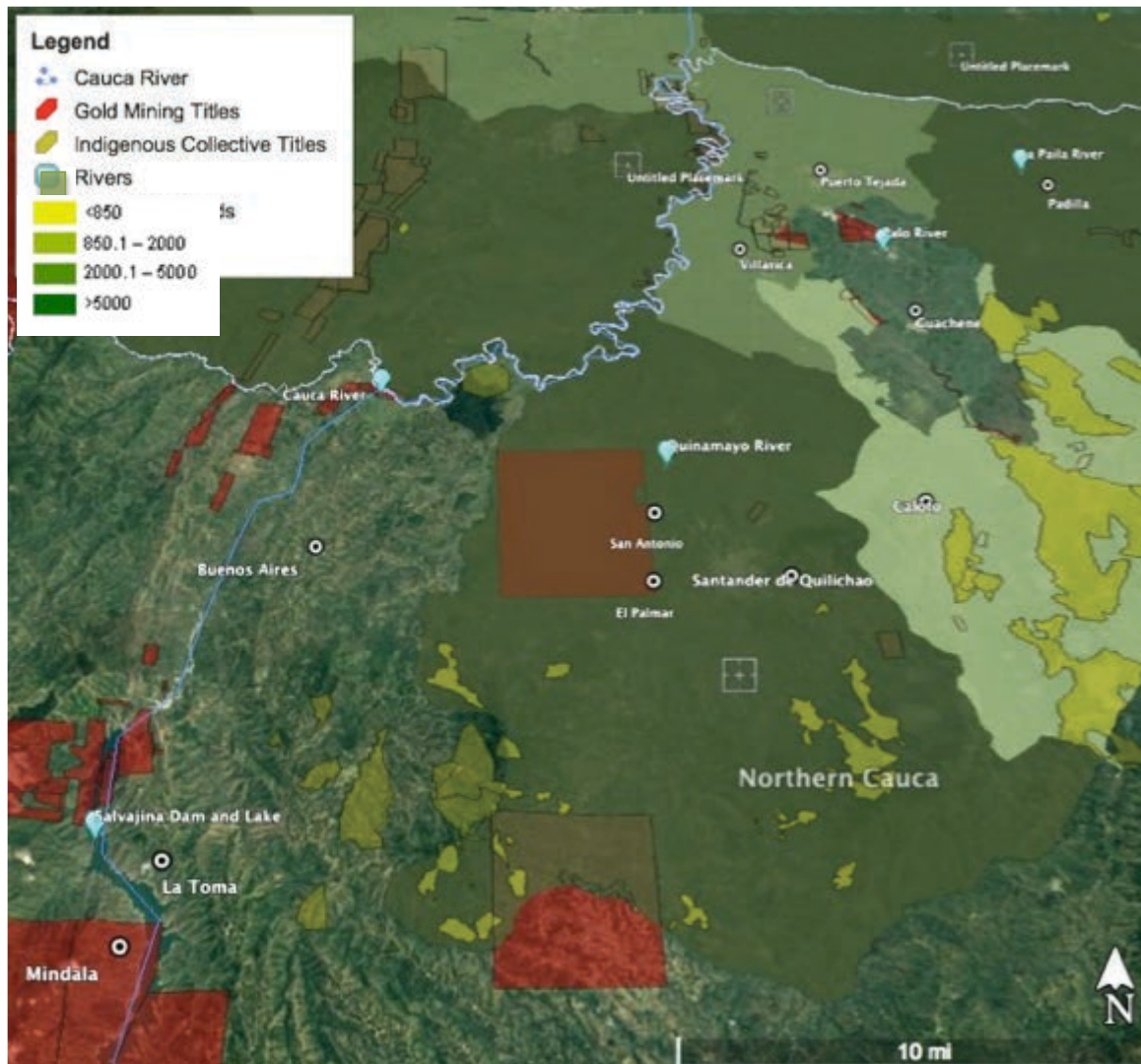
Figures 1 and 2. (Above), the *Salvajina* man-made lake and dam enclosed by the mountains of Mindalá, Meseta and La Toma in the western cordillera. (Below) Sugarcane industrial farms on the way to Guachené, along the flatlands of the Palo River in the Cauca River Valley. The mountains in the back are the ones seen above. Photographs by the Author.

Finally, in the foothills around Santander de Quilichao, and the flatlands of Villarica, Guachené and Padilla, I was asked in 2016 to participate in a series of dialogues and negotiations with state officials due to the extended impact of two development projects that were planned for this area (see Figure 2). The first was the upgrading and expansion of the Pan-American Highway to dual carriageway. The second one was the construction of an aqueduct that would provide drinking water to several towns. I visited about 20 places that were in tension with these projects, and interviewed local people as well as anthropologists and geographers hired by the state to explore how their expertise produced knowledge and “evidences” that had powerful effects. Rural households in these flatlands have diversified their ways of earning a living beyond the farming and mining activities so familiar to the highlands. These lowland towns are predominately enclosed by sugar cane plantations and industrial areas, and are involved in economies based on urban services, industrial manufacturing, and cash crop agriculture. Consequently, they constituted apt sites for contrasting differences in livelihood practices, biophysical features, and historical trajectories of development and involvement with rights movements. Here, as I will explain the final chapters, the endless fields of cane plantations and the shine of the metallic industrial areas appeared not always as the incarnation of an uneven social relation capable of producing dispossession, but also as a contradictory sites of attachments and expectations of modernity.

On epistemology and method

Giving these opportunities I decided, instead of forcing a prior research design, to adapt my methods to these ongoing practices. While conducting censuses, and participating in

meetings and workshops, I visited and stayed in several towns and settlements all along *Norte del Cauca*. Most of these were smallholdings of black peasants located in a scattered way along the mountain slopes of the western cordillera, and all along the tributary rivers of the Cauca basin (see Map 2).



Map 2. Area of study. Selected towns in Northern Cauca are shown along with their intersection with Gold Mining titles, Indigenous Collective titles, and the number of hectares of sugarcane. Map elaborated by the author with available data from the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural*, *Ministerio del Interior* and *Ministerio de Minas y Energia*. Software, Google Earth Pro.

In my involvement with the social processes active in each site, I conducted several semi-structured interviews attempting to get at the particular livelihood struggles and political engagements. For instance, in the western highlands of northern Cauca (e.g. the municipality of Suárez and Buenos Aires), giving the long history of gold mining, I inquired about the diverse range of mining practices and other productive processes that complement the household economy. I engaged in participant observation and conversations with small-scale mining and farmers focusing on the knowledge, and relations with the subsoil, minerals, and techniques necessary for small-scale mining, as well as for more mechanized operations (see Chapter 1). These research activities, that at the beginning only intended to be contextual, gain a central place when in the early 2014 the neighboring areas of Santander de Quilichao, in the foothills of the southwestern corner of the valley, became the quintessential site of what state officials and mainstream media labeled as *minería ilegal* [illegal mining]. In the struggles surrounding mining politics in Colombia, customary access of black peasants and miners ended up being conveniently confused with illegal activities and armed groups (see Chapter 5).

Both, in the highlands as well as in the flatlands of the valley, semi-structured interviews were followed up by systematic visits to engage in the elaboration of oral histories and to allow also the possibility of more informal conversations. On the one hand, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have used oral histories as a way of understanding social change and how people infuse meaning and plot to their contingent lives (e.g. Mintz 1989, Abrams 2016, Thompson 2017). While oral history, as a methodology, is often used to document life stories or a whole life cycle (when possible), I have approached them as vehicles of knowledge of any kind of memory of the past.

Most of the times depending on the context and questions I had, I focused only on just one theme, or one event in a lifetime. In others, following more a Latin American tradition, I used them as a bridge to connect collective as well as individual memories especially in the struggle to substantiate land rights or claims of victimhood. To some extent, this is part of a political tradition, not exempt of critiques, known as *testimoniar* or *testimonio*.²¹ However, issues of long-standing concern in the anthropological fieldwork, as the acknowledgement of the significance of the intersubjective relations, or the role of expert knowledge in the validation or constructions of certain experiences, were not absent in this process. The conducting of oral histories confronted me especially with the ways in which dialogs were established and narratives were constructed as part of the research interaction. As a Colombian citizen, the relationship established through oral histories allowed me to address my own vision of the region and the context, the role that I myself played in that construction, and the recognition of forms of discourse and understanding circulating and informing memory, both at the time of my fieldwork and in the past.

On the other hand, as it is commonplace in ethnographical research, informal conversations ended up often being more important and significant than formal interviews. Most of the fragments transcribed in this dissertation actually came out from such informal encounters. Not all found its way into the chapters in the form of dialog, some just came to be part of my contextual understanding. The ones that ended up being included were chosen for being provocative conversations that became central part of my arguments. Following the work of anthropologist as Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980), I granted these encounters and conversations an epistemological status on its own.²² I did

this mainly through a dialogical engagement, not only in the field but also in the text (West 2005). In recuperating the purpose of dialogue itself, coupled with oral histories, I think of myself as working within a tradition of narrative analysis (Rosaldo 1989), and within collaborative forms of co-theorization (Rapaport 2007). For one thing, while embracing narrativity I do not intend to render these encounters completely legible to the reader, but to enable an appreciation for the multiplicity of meanings and the open up of interpretation. Additionally, co-theorization as proposed by Rapaport, suggests that ethnography is more than a written text or a method of collecting data, but a critical space in which anthropologists and research participants can engage through conversations in the creation of new analytical constructs. In her words, “this is not simply of ethical import, but holds the potential of contributing new theoretical insights to our discipline” (Rappaport 2007:197).

Knowing however, that there is no such thing as an unmediated narrative, I tried to maintain a stance of reflexivity towards the criteria for selecting conversations and dialogs, and even more for reconstructing them as events and stories in the first place. As Hayden White has insisted, the impulse to moralize distinctive of history, of factual stories, can also be extended to storytelling and narrativity (White 1987). Therefore, I tried constantly to position myself within the picture and critically reflect on the poetical and rhetorical elements I was unfolding for making connections between them. Moreover, following the work of Paul Antze and Michael Lambek on traumatic memory, I tried constantly to remember that there was “nothing liberating in narrative per se” (Lambek and Antze 1996:xix). Unless one commits to the continuous work of interpretation, a particular version may claim complete authority and we can end up

condemned to repeat it or perhaps to silence others.

A corollary of conversation and oral history practice is the understanding of memory not as an object given in advance with an underlying knowledge or truth waiting to be discovered, but as a form of practice that is mutable and reflexive (Lambek and Antze 1996: xii, xiv). In deed, Lambek and Antze have identified instances of what they call “literalist” interpretations of memory, which associate it with veridicality, facticity, and realism. These are examples, they argue, of a broader cultural tendency in the West to make “assault[s] on fantasy” (Lambek and Antze 1996:xxviii). That is why a constant attention to the concept of landscape might be important when thinking of “memory”(Kirmayer 1996). It highlights the metaphorical as well as the cultural and spatial reference of acts of remembering. Kirmayer suggests that if we rhetorically privilege narrative, memory may then appear as “just a story”, again only “literal”. For this reasons, I tried (not always with success) to award a greater value not only to the social character of remembering, but also other sensorial elements and bodily memories (I will give details when discussing the drawing of counter-maps).

My understanding of *nortecaucanos*’ memories has been productively informed by “landscape walks” and “participatory mapping” sessions. In the first place, I tried to conduct interviews while accompanying people in their daily activities and journeys in order to explore dynamic narratives of changing relations to the territory, neighboring populations, agribusinesses, mineral extraction projects, and development programs. Through walking and crossing places with residents, I inquired about changes in animal populations, vegetation, forestry practices, alterations in weather patterns, and changes in the knowledge and meanings of land and forms of labor. In doing this, I did not however

consider labor and workers struggle as being somewhat secondary, being able only to modify or appropriate the abstract spaces already shaped by institutions, business, or the state (Lefebvre 1991:392), on the contrary, I tried to incorporate labor ethnographically as an agent whose activities and feelings could directly shape these landscapes in the first place.²³ In addition, using photographs taken in the field, local maps, and other documents gathered in preliminary archival research, I tried also to elicit the work of memory itself. In this sense, the pictures accompanying the dissertation are not just serving illustrative or aesthetics purposes, in the common sense of the word, they are also attempting to build relationships, to investigate properties and most important to allow written text to acquire a new significances under a new system of reference. This last function is perhaps closer to the conception of aesthetics in the philosophical tradition. In resemblance to this attitude Andreas Huyssen suggests, “the mode of memory is *recherché* rather than recuperation” (Huyssen 1995:3). And pushing further the analogy developed by Lévi-Strauss in *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), memory could be more the work of a *bricoleur* rather than of an *ingénieur*.

In this vein, I also worked with participatory mapping techniques as a way to conduct spatial interviews, useful for understanding how territorial claims were literally redrawing the boundaries of class relationships, property rights, and patterns of land use. Through these mapping techniques I explored not only the connections of everyday life activities with wider political struggles over resources, meanings, and territory, but also considered the materiality and liveliness of landscapes in shaping these activities and struggles. Instead of the spatial object that official maps constantly portray as a preexisting order separated from the social and political realms (Moore 2005, Scott 1998,

Winichakul 1994), participatory mapping has been widely used in social sciences as way of revealing senses of place, and negotiations around access, control, and management of resources. Through these maps, I solicited people to narrate the historical transformations of specific places and the impact of colonial, republican, and modern state policies in their territories. The maps also facilitated the comparative analysis of livelihood transformations over time. In addition, this technique provided a means through which to inquire about expectations of the state, residential strategies, and networks of exchange and communication with family, neighbors, and friends who work in the industrial areas nearby, or in the urban areas of the region.

While drawing and working with these maps, papers, markers and participants kept moving around the floor. People turned from one side to the other, developing and expanding the map every time that someone mentioned a place or site. What we now see as a single unit, actually began as separate sheets that gradually began to reveal places and memories as an outcome of interconnected social and environmental processes. In these mapping processes, places and lines cannot be separated or considered apart from their own process of becoming and, perhaps, more important were a domain where contradictions and overlappings were admissible. In fact, the map was a way to thinking through contradictions. It was the result of competing senses of place, which in different ways embodied the landscape and its multiple meanings. These disjunctions revealed different forms of knowledge and embodiment that were continuously and mutually (re)producing each other.

However, it is important to recognize the limitations of “counter-mapping” as a means to social justice and self-determination (Hodgson and Schroeder 2002, Sletto

2009). There is clearly a potential reproduction of uneven gender relations and other power inequalities in local communities; in addition, it is often said that counter-mapping reproduces binaries like local and global, developed and underdeveloped and so on. Therefore, I tried to pay more attention to the social process of making these maps, instead of the final form. I approached mapping sessions as a window to understand not only competing senses of place, but also both how people were experiencing state policies and the new legal regimes. The particularities of the mapping process have provided different possibilities of understanding territory both as strategic, instrumental and material grounded, as well as expressive, embodied, creative and experiential.

Throughout all these activities, I came to an initial understanding of the landscapes, livelihoods, and subjectivities of *nortecaucanos*. Seeking to represent a variation of social positions and group membership, I did participant observation in daily livelihood activities and gatherings that were part of planning and organizing processes of black community councils of the area. I attended meetings with state official where these social leaders presented their territorial claims and demands of recognition, as well as experienced and inquired about the involvement of academics, NGO's and international cooperation agencies. Later on during my writing up, I revisited these sites and organizations in order to track the changes in mobilization and livelihood struggles. On each revisit to these areas, I stayed for a few days attending festivities, talking to social leaders, and conversing with long-time residents, as well as with more young ones.

Whereas these sites and activities allowed me to contrast dimensions of sociopolitical organization, livelihood, and emotional investments with the landscape and territory, I was also concerned with the social process of becoming of *nortecaucano* black

peasantry. Specifically, I was interested in the impact of a myriad of business initiatives and industrial zones that have recently added complexity to proletarianization process in the area. In the name of the “right to intervene” as ‘responsible’ citizens and promote socioeconomic ‘growth,’ these enterprises have generated in black residents of the flatlands near Guachené and the Palo River, contradictory desires for improvement, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility. For this reasons, I chose a site in the vicinity of an industrial area where a paper company was about to commence promoting qualitative and medical research to guide and make more effective their self-proclaimed ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’. I volunteered to take part in one of these research teams lead by a public health department of a local University. Thanks to this connection, I was granted access to reports and measurements of specific interventions and was able to interview staff members, as well as local participants involved in a micro-entrepreneur program. Here, among ‘corporate social responsibility’ representatives and local residents, I conducted interviews and held conversations that included questions pertinent on entrepreneurship as a means for economic developed and subject making. Along these activities I participated in different instances of social life and talked to local people involved as beneficiaries of these programs examining the fractures, complex collaborations, and the compromised position of corporations and social foundations that promise improvements.

Deciding that this was a unique opportunity to explore what appeared to be an exemption within the predominant discourse and political organization around ethnic claims, I explored this growing emphasis on entrepreneurship as a means for a different form of belonging, economic development, and subject making. I did this by exploring

the restructuration of development plans and social intervention programs under the flags of ‘corporate social responsibility,’ entrepreneur and peace building initiatives.

Nortecaucanos’ involvement with these programs and initiatives points at the existence of diverse understandings of rights. In these industrial landscapes of the flatlands, rights are not achieved through the commonly taken for granted values of ‘cultural difference’ and ‘local autonomy.’ Or at least not “autonomy” understood as a rejection of development or modernity, but understood as a demand for social equity in access to the benefits of such improvements (Peet and Watts 2004). Thus, not everything is political negotiation, protest, social mobilization or a vaguely specified ‘resistance’ to power. There are also attempts to assert national membership and equality through likeness and expectations of modernity (Ferguson 1999).

Finally, at different times during my fieldwork I visited the *Archivo Central del Cauca*, and *Archivo General de la Nación*, looking for documents of the colonial period and independence times that could help established a historical context and comparative basis for the sites where I was spending most of the time. This was also an opportunity to examine and challenge recurrent tropes and periodizations that I had found in the local academic literature. In addition, I gathered reports and records that advised different countries in Latin America on infrastructure integration, labor and land use. For instance, documents from the *Rockefeller Archive Center*, in upstate New York, and the CIAT institute in Palmira were relevant to analyze agricultural development in the upper Cauca Valley (see Chapter 3). This later work also served for exploring what were the linkages between local agencies and national and international concerns regarding politics, security and development projects.

These archival activities brought to light issues that had emerged during fieldwork but were not fully explored. For instance, in colonial times highlands and lowlands formed part of a larger system known in Latin America as the *hacienda-mina* complex, which I explore in Chapter 2. This system connected distant places through a dynamic and extended commerce. The owners of main slave estates in the inter-Andean Cauca Valley controlled mining settlements from the foothills to the other side of the cordillera in the Pacific region. The *hacienda* provided food and basic needs, and the mining areas sent gold and other commodities back. Apart from these exchanges, the mining camps amidst the Pacific region were predominately isolated due to the extreme conditions of roads and extraordinary high humidity of the forest. Therefore, overseers and masters faced enormous challenges in controlling enslaved populations there. However, the mining camps of the upper Cauca river valley, also known as *las minas de adentro* [the interior mines], were under a tighter grip. This is the case of Mindala and Gelima, early mining settlements that charted the growth of gold exploration and that even after independence was continued under the control of the *hacienda* Japio (see Chapter 1).

A word must be said regarding the use of the term *Nortecaucano*, to refer in general to the people with whom I did this study. Research participants used many different names and categories to talk about themselves, such as blackpeasants, blackpeople, nortecaucanos, Afronortecaucanos, and Afro-Colombians. These categories are not exclusionary, but may coexist and sometimes are used interchangeably. As we shall see along the chapters, what people use largely depended on the space of enunciation. This includes of course, not only the subject's position and the sites whose

authority either licenses the utterance or provokes the response, but also who is the interlocutor and under which frameworks those terms could be interpreted and have effects.

The interviews and workshops I conducted, were all in Spanish and later translated to English attempting as much as possible to preserve the speaker's original meaning. When I was not able to capture the tone, I left words in their original language and provided details in English to help the reader understand certain concepts or expressions. To produce a narrative flow and reduce redundancy, I have edited some interviews and, at instances, assembled multiple voices to tell complicated stories. In all cases, I have used pseudonyms and changed some personal details to protect research participants' confidentiality.

Analytics and outline

This dissertation is an historical ethnography as much as an ethnography of historicity. In other words, it does not only incorporate a historical perspective into ethnography, but it also investigates ethnographically the tropes and series of "events" arranged by the work of historical periodization. Because of the myriad of actors, spaces and historical contexts it tries to connect this dissertation develops an "analytic of entanglement" in the formation of the region's historically sedimented landscapes and socially reproduced power relations (Moore 2005:17-25). My aim in doing this is not to define an empirical territory, or a historical and cultural region. My fundamental concern in adopting this analytic is to hold the temptation to write "history" as the working out of a more or less logical sequence of moments structured by long-standing extractive practices and racialized production relations. If a teleological narrative is assumed in advance, then the temporal

coexistence of contrasting articulations and a wide range of specific social configurations and material processes will escape our understanding. Narratives that oscillate between teleological images of agrarian and urban transition, and essentialized views of resistance and autonomy have long characterized studies of this place. This dissertation follows these stories and periodizations to investigate what these depictions convey today for its inhabitants, as well as how have these meanings become part of the ways of understanding and experiencing their lives and struggles. But it also examines to what extent they have foreclosed important political and theoretical debates.

I have divided the dissertation into three parts, which roughly correspond to historical moments and geographical movements. Detailing how extractive labor regimes brought people into contact with the land and the subsoil, the first part of the dissertation (See Chapters 1 and 2) argue that what is left are not just histories of exploitation, oppression, and destruction. On the contrary, these experiences have forged deep connections between people, landscapes and politics, allowing inhabitants in the Cauca Valley in Colombia to understand themselves, their place, and the surrounding landscapes precisely through their labor. Moreover, the part argues that land and its resources are valuable not precisely by natural or preexisting condition, but because enslaved and other marginalized populations made them valuable through their labor. The part delves into the critical role these populations played in the creation of the system of production that provided the foundation of Cauca's region wealth at least since the XVI century. It also considers the histories of land use and labor allocation that can help explain why for *nortecaucanos* land insecurity has continued to be the rule.

My writing strategy throughout Part I moves back and forth in time weaving present day cases and vignettes with historically configured situations, including the history of slavery and its aftermath, the period of post-abolition, and the rise of the “free peasantry.” The part is formed by a series of vignettes, wherein detailed accounts of the actions and choices of specific “characters” attempts to reveal larger social and historical processes. The analysis is one that emphasizes relationships between colonialism and modernity, work and nature, in an effort to counter portraits of *nortecaucanos* in terms of “purity” and distance from the modern. In other words, I argue that there is nothing primordial about these populations; they are in fact the product of wide-ranging global process including enslavement, labor exploitation, and racialization within the modern nation-state project.

Part II (Chapter 3) focuses on how infrastructural innovations, agricultural development, and public policies brought the valley into being. In this chapter, I work with oral histories gathering different traveling and exchange experiences throughout the upper Cauca River, across the Railroad, and the along Pan-American Highway. I complement ethnography with participatory mapping technics, and reports relating to development programs and policies. The chapter covers from Pan-American efforts of infrastructure integration, hemispheric hydraulic and agricultural modernization initiatives, and agrarian reforms that fostered the expansion of the agroindustry in the region, to contemporary policies for industrial development (e.g. Ley Páez 1995), “free trade” agreements, and corporate “social responsibility” initiatives (e.g. UN Global Compact). Instead of assuming that the region was a victim of discourses and projects of infrastructural development or scientific agriculture throughout the early 20th century, as

sometimes stated in one-sided assumptions about United States influence over the region, I argue here that the Cauca Valley with its own problems and ideas, as well as with the exchange of expert knowledge, coproduced and helped to export what essentially became a model of development for other countries. One of the objectives of this chapter is to show that what the river and the land meant fifty years ago in terms of belonging and community was gradually replaced by the expectations of modernity embodied first in the speed of the railroads and later in the shine of metalized industrial areas. Thus, this chapter and part insists also on the importance of paying attention to its constitutive relations and emergent effects, to the life worlds that such systems shape and transform, to the complicated emotional investments that operate at the level of knowledge, imagination, and desires.

The third part (Chapters 4 and 5) develops a more comparative perspective between the highlands and the lowlands paying particular attention to *nortecaucanos*' rights mobilizations and their different historical and ecological trajectories. As the political and material landscape of the valley is currently shifting under the pressures of growing land and resource interests, newly emplaced Industrial Parks, and free trade zones, *nortecaucanos* must carefully maneuver between the racialized juridical categories of the "multicultural" constitution, the extractive economies of development plans and entrepreneur initiatives, and pursuing their own pathways to social justice and economic difference. On the one hand, by looking at how some communities struggle to gain recognition and a degree of sovereignty, most of the time "failing" at the expected cultural and spatial dimensions of distinctiveness set by state-endorsed "multicultural" reforms, this part interrogates what kinds of claims have more traction in the neoliberal

state. In this sense, it asks how state and transnational definitions of “blackness,” “autonomy” and “resistance” have become inscribed, aspired, and challenged in a particular region as the Cauca River valley. On the other hand, the part also addresses expectations of modernity and entrepreneurial success related to mining activities that stand in tension with construction of ethnicity in terms of ancestrality and distance from the modern. The point is that while many *nortecaucanos* have pan-mined for gold in the surrounding rivers since enslaved populations were brought to the region in the 1500s, “artisanal mining” is often deemed illegal by authorities, lumped into the same category as the armed groups’ operations. Meanwhile, large multinational mining operations are granted by the State tax breaks and high royalties in the region. Nowadays, one of the few ways people have to continue practicing mining in the area is by affirming that their practice are done according to “ancestral live visions” and “traditional technologies.” People are demanded by social and environmental movements to portray an anti-developmentalism stand. This chapter shows the interconnections between all these actors and discourses, which is more complex and has more gray areas than usually portrayed.

Therefore, the chapters in this part track the historical continuities of social and material practices that has shaped racialized subject formation and ordered new strategies of governance in Latin America today. In other words, the chapters use *nortecaucanos*’ active engagement with state-endorsed “multicultural” reforms and mining politics, to investigate what such policies and categorizations can tell us about the configurations, tensions, and effects of state-making processes in Colombia today. Here, I examine not only the discourses and practices involved in the production of new patterns of control

over land, labor, and populations, but also the struggles to “occupy” their meanings and spaces. This means, attending to the different material conditions, subject positions, and practices afforded by multicultural and developmental regimes, as well as to their meanings and values as they are actively lived in landscapes, livelihoods, and subjectivities.

Chapter 1. First it was Gold

“This is how my father used to extract mineral,” said Bertha, a woman in in her sixties descendant of colonial enslaved crews forcibly resettled since 1600s from the African continent to the western Andean cordillera of Colombia. “He entered the *socavón* [mine tunnel] and broke rocks, like these ones, with a *muela* [long chisel]. Then he filled up tin cans; the kind of cans where pork lards used to be stored,” she said turning the stone chip in her hand to find the best position for the grindstone. “Later, my brothers and I brought them home. From night till dawn we worked under candlelight grinding them,” Bertha said slowly, harmonizing her words with her grinding task.

Bertha is a miner from Mindala, a *corregimiento* [administrative subdivision of a municipality] in the northern part of the Cauca Department —Colombia’s equivalent of a state—, which is about 60 kilometers southwest of the city of Cali, and about two hours by road. With approximately 1298 residents, according to the last official census, and an elevation of 1,250 meters above sea level, Mindala is formed by nine *veredas* [townships] that unravel quickly all over the surrounding hill country forming a patchwork of scattered houses, forest, crops, and mining camps. Most of these hills possess the view of a twenty-three kilometers long reservoir constructed over the Cauca River, with an average width of four hundred meters. Before this manmade lake and hydroelectric dam, known as La Salvajina and inaugurated in 1986, Bertha was raised going up and down everyday between the town [Suárez] and the Cauca River.

Sitting in the dirt under an improvised plastic rooftop, Bertha continued crushing up the stone chips using both hands: “When we were not in school my father brought us here to help him. But when the farm was not doing well, we spent more time in the mine. He had built there a small house in *bahareque* [mud reinforced with sticks or canes] with burlap sacks as doors, and a garret room,” she said. Due to this seasonal migration to the mines combined with small-scale farming, Bertha learned from a very young age to use all sorts of mining tools. Among them, the *almocafre*, a hand tool made out of iron tapering to a point, held a significant place in her everyday routine (see Figure 3). Design for scraping the floor of a ground sluice to loosen gold bearing clay and gravels and prepare them for the washing process, Bertha cherished the instrument not only for its utility, but also as part of the haunting presence of a colonial past.¹

As Bertha made these comments, I looked around for the source of the rocks she was grinding. The cloudless sky, partially covered by dense vegetation, made rocks shine here and there, but I could not find any mine entrance nearby. She reminded me that she had brought me along to *ripear* or *chatarrear*, as miners in this part of the country like to say when they take advantage of debris and leftover materials from bigger mines.² Yet, in a region in which small mining figured centrally in the local economy as a form of livelihood, she assured me that there was no problem taking the rocks: “somehow *todos venimos de estas piedras* [we all come from these rocks],” she remarked. “It is because of the gold that we are who we are today: free and proud men and women,” said Bertha.



Figure 3. Bertha's mining technique. In the lower part of the image, the *almocafre* tool, described in the text, is shown. Photograph by the author.

Confronted with these metaphors of belonging and pride that referred to relations with mining tools and chunks of material that lied many miles deep, I visited in following months the nearest Geology Department and talked to a young professor specialized in mineral engineering. “No matter what you are writing,” he assured me, “it would be obsolete by the time you published it. If you consider we are dealing with geologic time, you would be surprise of how fast the discipline [of geology] is moving today due to the mining boom,” he said. When he was just a student, in 2006, this professor had participated in a geological survey for the entire Cauca Department. He had spent days in Mindala and Suárez gathering mineralogical samplings from boulders and rock faces: “To be honest, I also wanted to find gold by myself. Not that I wanted to do anything with it, just to find it. I remember carrying my geologist pick around, and how local miners made fun of me telling me that it was not a proper tool for finding gold.” He kept in his desk one of those rocks as paperweight. “See this white color? That’s quartz. In the Suárez Stock, gold often comes with it,” he said, showing me the rock (see Figure 4).

Trying his disciplinary limits, I asked the geologist if he had any idea of what Bertha’s words, could tell about the historical and environmental forces through which the region and its populations took shape. He grinned hesitantly, and confessed to me that he didn’t know about metaphors. But, he later explained that in addition to the geotectonic units and realms interacting in Northern Andes, geoscientists considered the bounding suture and fault systems (see Map 3). At a regional scale, geophysical evidence indicated that the Cauca-Patia intermountain depression coincided with a major boundary between oceanic crust to the west, of which the Western Cordillera is part, and the continental crust of the South American plate to the east.

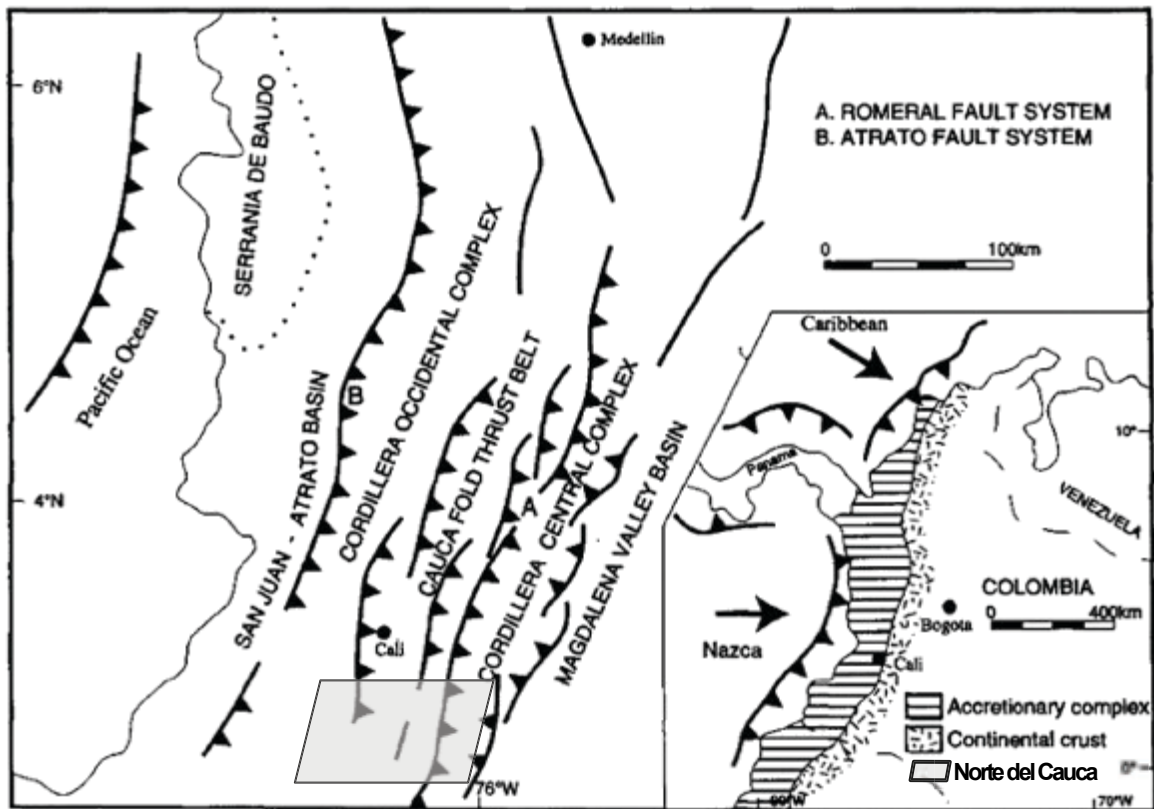


Figure 4 and Map 3. Above, rock from the Suárez Stock. Photograph by the author. Below, Major tectonic units of the northwestern corner of South America and regional tectonic setting of the Cauca Valley. Source: Alfonso et al. 1994 (modified to show the area of study).

This boundary, in terms of both lithology and ages of main rock complexes, corresponds to the Cauca-Romeral Fault system, which cross the northern Andes from Guayaquil in Ecuador up to the Caribbean Sea. This active fault system is part of a complex sequence of accretions of the pacific *terrane*s obliquely subducted since the Cretaceous below the continental South America plate (Cediel et al. 2003, Alfonso et al. 1994).³

As the months progressed, I learned that these kinds of rocks, known by specialists as Granodeorita and Cuarzodioritas, contained indeed an extraordinary amount of history.⁴ The problem was that this geologic history seemed to be alien and passive with respect to human scale. It is common to say that, the sense of geologic time usually escapes human experience. The slow rate of its processes is only altered in catastrophic events like earthquakes, rockslides, or volcano eruptions among others, but for the rest of the time the changes are only of some centimeters per year.

Still, there was something in Bertha's grinding technique, and in her ways of knowing through getting in contact with materials and mining tools that made me think differently. In her own sense of connection with mining tools, gold, and rocks, human and geologic time scales seemed to intersect. In his series of journeys across North America in the company of geologists, the journalist John McPhee (1998) found exactly this same connection. He argued that when mining of any kind began, both time scales intersected. When this happens, McPhee argued: "the effects can be as lasting as they are pronounced" (McPhee 1989:458). The philosopher Manuel de Landa, also argues that mineralization and geological processes, far from having been, left behind as primeval stage of the earth's evolution, fully coexisted with the social formations made up from fleshy and gelatinous matter (de Landa 2005:26-27).

Could Bertha's metaphor and person-object relations be a form of historical thought that brought other agents and dimensions into the choice of the northern Cauca region as the site of a major Spanish settlement? Could the spatially and materially defined practices of mining work as a meaning making process that speaks about forms of belonging in the region? And, more to the point, how could colonial histories of extraction and exploitation become powerful sites of attachment and feelings for people like Bertha?

In this chapter, I explore these questions placing emphasis in the forced labor regimes, mining practices, and terrains (including the many technics that help constitute them) that have interacted historically in the construction of the northern Cauca region and its populations. Following developments in geography and anthropology that have sought to make sense of the role of the materiality and liveliness of landscapes (including the subterranean) in the shaping of technologies, sensibilities, political life, and work regimes (Braun 2008, Prudham 2005, Kosek 2006, Cruikshank 2005, Scott 2008), I argue in this chapter that Bertha's words didn't intend to describe a romantic relationship with the mine, but rather a sense of coproduction. Differently from social leaders and even scholars that I interviewed during my fieldwork, for Bertha "descending" from a rock full of gold didn't mean that they were the offspring of untouched geological elements; on the contrary, it meant that they were part of a centuries-long engagement with colonialism, capitalism, and state formation. In some cases enslaved Africans use their mining knowledge to bargain for better conditions, in others mining gold enabled freedom and later self-sufficiency. For these reasons, research participants spoke of mining with longing, rather than with dread.

These ‘deep histories’, always on the move, structure the present chapter. First, I offer the necessary historical context for understanding the colonial province of Popayán and the establishment of its mining districts and particular forced labor regimes (e.g. Indian *encomienda* and African slavery). Special attention is devoted to the Caloto mining district (present day *Norte del Cauca*). Here, the case of the mines of Gelima, documented since 1605, and allegedly one of the richest sites around, deserves attention.⁵ Second, I argue that the gold found in the tertiary materials and exposed across the northern edge of the Popayán plateau was not simply waiting to be extracted. Gold mining, with its different techniques, conditions, and obstacles, co-constituted settlements patterns, senses of place, social bonds, and later defined the region’s populations and interconnectivity with global markets and larger regimes of labor exploitation.

*La Gobernación de Popayán:
in search of the source of the Inca ‘splendor’*

Discussions around ancestors and history, mining and people, labor and nature became recurrent in my visits to towns in the country hill of Suárez. Between August and December 2015, I carried on these conversations while accompanying Faviola, a young social leader of Mindala appointed to gather oral histories and census data to substantiate the right to prior consultation and constitutional protection as an afro-descendent group (about these processes see chapter 4). Unlike many inhabitants of Mindala, who engaged in multiple activities (farming, mining, hunting, fishing), Faviola considered herself a *comerciante* [merchant]. However, like many other rural woman she had plantains and other subsistence crops like yucca in her backdoor garden. She and her sister in law woke up every morning around four to manually grind corn and prepare *arepas*, *caldo* and

coffee for miners and travelers arriving in the early *chiva* [local transport system]. Her home, situated close to the narrow top of the Salvajina dam, served as a meeting point for community gatherings and as a place for people to leave parcels or messages. Among her other duties, Faviola was a mother of three adolescents and an active member of the “black community council.”

As I walked with Faviola on a hot humid afternoon, the echo of explosions reverberating through the hills directed my sight nervously in all directions. “*No se preocupe* [no worries],” she laughed, “, I know it sounds like *cilindros* [rudimentary guerilla mortars made out of gas cylinders], but that sound is from the mines,” she said. “It’s about to be one in the afternoon, and that’s one of the last things miners do in the tunnels. Tomorrow they will return to work when the dust is *asentado* [seated].” In the best case scenario mines have incipient systems of ventilation, but in most cases the tunnels have a dead end and the air does not regenerate properly.⁶ Faviola stopped for a while and raised her head looking towards the chain of dark green mountains: “Despite being here in the middle of the cordillera, these lands have been *muy codiciadas* [very coveted],” Faviola said acknowledging that my fear for guerilla mortars was not unfounded.

Faviola’s words resonated staggeringly with the archival records that I have read in the city of Popayán. Today armed groups and drug traffickers dispute the zone as a strategic corridor for the movement of troops and the shipment of narcotics towards the international market via the Pacific Ocean (see Chapters 4 and 5). But, for most part of the sixteenth century, the southwest part of present-day Colombia was part of a covetable frontier land; first for the Inca Empire and later for the Spanish Crown. The Incas had

attempted to penetrate the region since the second half of the fifteenth century, managing to conquer good parts of the indigenous groups known as the *Pastos*, who inhabited Ecuador's northernmost province of Carchi and the present-day southernmost Colombian province of Nariño. Later on, during the Spanish conquest late pre-Hispanic societies⁷ that existed to the north of Inca domination faced the incursions of various Spanish conquistadores, who struggled to fashion a new colonial outpost in their quest for the fabulous treasures of a certain golden king, or city of gold [El Dorado], believed to be the source of the Inca splendor.⁸

About 1534, according to the Spanish soldier and chronicler Cieza de León, Sebastian de Belalcázar —*encomendero* during the conquest of Nicaragua, and lieutenant of Pizarro and Almagro during the conquest of Perú— set off without orders to “*apaciguar*” [appease] the northernmost domains of the Inca Empire (present day Ecuador and southwest Colombia).⁹ After founding the city of “San Francisco de Quito” in the same year and gathering an army that included a considerable number of indigenous recruits and allies, Belalcázar entered into present-day Colombian territory following the trail of Juan de Ampudia's reconnaissance party (also known as “el Atila del Cauca”).¹⁰ After several months of skirmishes and scouting he founded the towns of Santiago de Cali in 1536, and the towns of San Juan de Pasto and Popayán in 1537. This later town was described by Cieza de León as “a very good seat, the healthiest and with the best temperature that can be found in all the Province and even throughout the greater part of Perú, because the quality of the air seems more like Spain than the Indies” (Cieza de León [1553] 2000:152). As a reward, Belalcázar was granted the military title of *adelantado* [the advanced, or the one who goes ahead], which gave him the faculty to

discover, conquer and populate any lands and provinces that have not been discovered or found by another conquistador.

Detached from Perú and outside the royal jurisdiction of any existing *audiencia* [high court] or viceroy, Belalcázar's conquered lands and towns would eventually conform a new Province, named *La Gobernación de Popayán*. In 1540, a *Cédula Real* confirmed Belalcázar as Governor of the new territory, which was to be ambiguously delimited in the following terms:

It is our will and mercy that now and henceforth for the rest of your life you will be governor and captain general of the cities of Popayán and Cali and the towns of Anserma and Neiva with all the boundary marks and common lands which in those provinces have been assigned to you and your lieutenants and captains, as long as the town of San Francisco de Quito and its environs are not included [in your territory] (quoted in Crist 1952:13).

Broken terrain and often washed-out trails isolated the region for long time. Rough cordilleras and treacherous rivers geographically framed its main towns. To the west the rain forest and large vertical columns of rock restricted the way to the Pacific Ocean, to the east and south “the mountain maze of the Pasto knot throws up range after range to make connections laborious in the extreme” (Marzahl 1978:3). Meanwhile, the Cauca River, which runs north from the Colombian Massif and eventually joins the Magdalena River not far from the port of Cartagena, was not an outlet to the Caribbean Sea.¹¹ The big River, as conquistadors first named it, was only navigable from the mouth of the Ovejas River near the point of Gelima till the mountainous territory of Antioquia near the mouth of Risaralda River.

Besides being situated first in the margins of the Viceroyalty of Perú (1563—1717), and later with respect to the new viceroyalty of New Granada (1717-1819), the

vagueness of boundary lines and broken terrain, encouraged disputes among conquistadores altering constantly the contours of the new Province. To the Pacific coast, Belalcázar soon took over Pascual de Andagoya's lands. To the northeast, if it had not been for Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada and Nicolás de Federmán, whom conquered the highlands of central Colombia, the Province would have extended probably till the city of Bogotá. Two years later, the *Mariscal* [Marshal] Jorge Robledo, once trusted captain of Belalcázar, attempted to defy his command venturing far north in the *Gobernación* and claiming towns under his jurisdiction. Along with Cieza de León, Robledo took part in the foundation of the towns Santa Ana de los Caballeros (later Anserma), Cartago and Antioquia, all of them within the newly formed Province of Popayán. According to Cieza de León, he tried to dissuade Robledo unsuccessfully, warning him many times to retreat from the city of Antiochia, because Belalcázar came mighty and after all was Governor of the King (Cieza de León 2005[1877]:xcv-xvcii). Belalcázar had indeed the Viceroyalty of Perú on his side, and a feared reputation that Cieza knew very well. Finally, Belalcázar ordered in 1546 the execution of Robledo leaving his head exposed as sign for others. Therefore, conquistadores disputed these lands ferociously not exclusively against strong native resistance, but mainly between themselves.

Studying the relationship between Popayán and the Spanish empire in seventeenth century, the historian Peter Marzahl (1978) found in this sustained rivalry and land quarrels an explanation for the shifting limits of the province and the profusion of towns. Up to eight towns were founded within the first five years of the Spaniards intrusion. This number contrasted significantly with practices in the Viceroyalty of Perú, where there

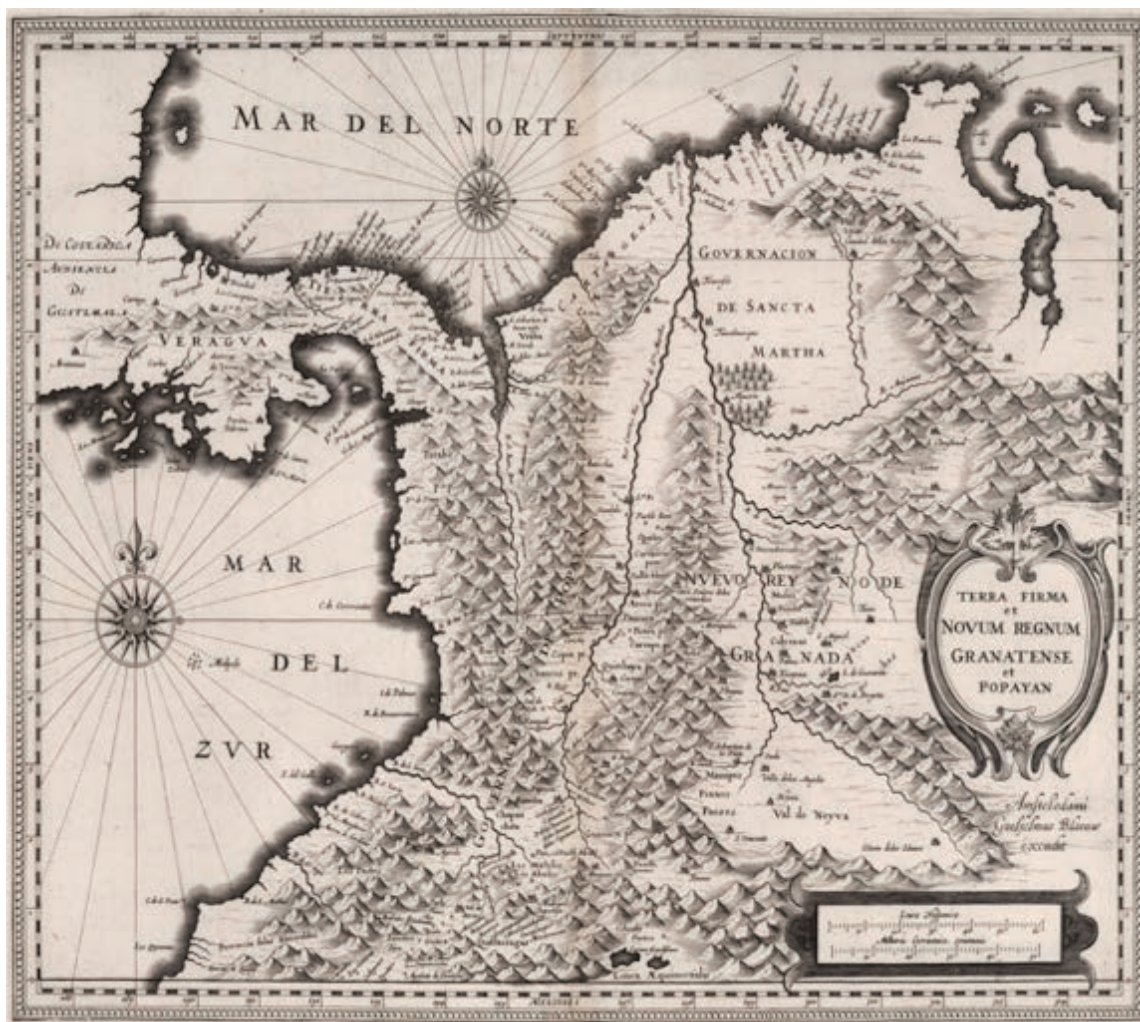
were fewer settlements in relation to the land and population to be controlled (Marzahl 1978:4).

The Crown itself did not appear to be willing to resolve completely conquistador's grievances, but rather seemed more interested in stimulating the effective occupation of territories, by allowing competition and ambivalence both in rules and charts (Colmenares 1978:18). Encompassing first lands in the Amazonian piedmont, the Andean region, and the Pacific lowlands (including the north coast of Ecuador), the *Gobernación de Popayán* eventually lost the regions of Antioquia at the end of the sixteenth century and the Chocó province at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Hernandez 2006:18, Herrera 2006) (See Maps 4, 5 and 6). Soon after its constitution as *Gobernación*, the north part of this vast territory (mainly Cartago, Anserma and Antioquia) fall under the *audiencia* (or high court) of SantaFé (1549-1739), but the south part remained under the jurisdiction of Quito (1563-1819).¹² Albeit this double jurisdictional dependency, the new province remained in many ways autonomous from these continental centers of the Crown.

Taking advantage of the fragile and divided administrative action enacted by *audiencias*, most towns in the province (although sparsely populated) emerged as centers of power (Colmenares 1992:2, Herrera 2009:26,80, Marzahl 1978:55-73). Yet these towns by themselves hardly guarantee the progress of the conquest, neither the control over the economic surplus extracted from native populations:

[...] because, if pressed by need, they would do what others do. But there is another and much greater cause, namely that all these provinces and regions [around Popayán] are very fertile, and on all sides there are dense thickets of jungle, canebrake, and underbrush. So that when the Spanish press them, they burn the houses they live in, which are made of wood and straw, and go away a league or two as they see fit, and in three or

four days they make another house, and in as many more, sow as much maize as they want; and inside four months they reap it. And if [the Spanish] search them out there too, they can advance further on, or go back, leaving the place, and anywhere they go or stay, they find food to eat and rich soil ready to give them fruits. And for this reason they serve [the Spanish conquistadors] when they choose to, and hold war and peace in their own hands, and never lack food (Cieza de León 2000[1553]:105).



Map 4. The *Gobernación de Popayán* circa 1633. As shown in this early map the limits of the province encompassed first parts of the Amazon, Antioquia and the Pacific Lowlands. In the area of study the Ovejas River is identified, but there is no mention of the town of Caloto or the mines of the area. These omissions could be related to the source of the map, which was drawn by the Holland cartographer Hessel Gerritsz. The map can be found in the *Archivo General de Nación* (Colombia, Bogotá), MAPOTECA: SMP.4,REF.X-63



Map 8 and 9. This set of maps dates back to 1793 and 1797. Contrary to the map 2 both privilege the axis Quito-Popayán and detail (in the area of study) the towns of Caloto and the newly formed villa of Quilichao. In the second one the provinces of Antioquia, Choco and Raposo-Viscunde-Barbacoas appeared differentiated. The maps are from the *Archivo General de Indias* in Sevilla Spain. AGI/MP-PANAMA,222 and AGI/MP-PANAMA,220.

But frictions of terrain and conflicts between conquistadores or jurisdictions alone are not enough to understand the spatial configurations and patterns of settlement along the intermountain province of the Cauca drainage. Mineral deposits, native resistance, and pre-Hispanic forms of territorial organization also had its part in this process. In 1547, an unknown writer at the service of the Bishop described the Province as,

(...) one of the richest gold regions of America; for, though it is more than 300 leagues long, there is not a village, river, brook, nor mountain, in which gold is not found in abundance, and of a fine quality. Much has been extracted, and immense quantities are still taken out, every day (unknown, cited in Restrepo 1886:73).

Perhaps informants like this one were just trying to capitalize on such tales by offering their services to the Crown in securing these treasures. Belalcázar had in fact done this. In his letters describing his victorious entrance to the Cauca Valley there are accounts of natives running away from the soldiers and leaving gold behind (Garcés 1936). Pedro Cieza de León also reported about these riches:

There are many provinces and tribes of Indians near the source of this river, and as much wealth in the gold mines, as that possessed by the Indians, and so great, is the trade in gold that it cannot be exaggerated. (Cieza de León 2000[1553]:154-155).

Yet, during the first years of the Spaniard's intrusion, natives groups not only harassed the new settlements, but also refused to be thrown into the mines. On the one hand, native groups described as *Paéces* and *Pijaos*, who lived in the central cordillera, forced the abandonment of the town of Caloto several times between 1563 and 1596.¹³ *La nueva Segovia de Caloto* was finally relocated from the highlands to the piedmont where the central and western cordilleras open widely to form the savanna grasslands of the Cauca Valley. Constituting now a middle point in the royal road between the administrative centers of Cali and Popayán, the town of Caloto ended up satisfying both

defensive and mining interests (Salazar 2004; AGI QUITO, 16,R.8, N.24). On the other hand, according to the Colombian historian Germán Colmenares the period from 1545 to 1550 yields the weakest performance of gold production, mainly due to indigenous rebellions (Colmenares 1972:19). Cieza de León confirms these struggles to regularize exploitation in the early mining settlements:

Many are amazed at how these Indians [i.e. of Popayán], despite having many of their villages in places liable to easy conquest, and despite the fact that the weather in the region is nowhere [except in the city of Pasto] very cold or hot, and despite other factors favorable for conquest, have nonetheless turned out to be so indomitable and stubborn; while the [Indians] of Perú, whose valleys lie among mountains and snowcapped crags and many cliffs and rivers, and who are far more numerous than those here [in Popayán], and who dwell close by great uninhabited expanses, do serve [the Spaniards] and have turned out to be so tame and docile (Cieza de León 2000[1553]:105).

It is difficult to deny that this othering process, or the making of others, was also used to justify the founding of towns during early colonial times, and was used as means for obtaining royal titles and *encomiendas* [a grant of Indian tribute usually collected in labor] from the Spanish Crown. In fact, this perceived “indomancy and stubbornness” was not only a representation of the past. Helping Faviola interviewing people and touring the mountains of the *corregimiento* surveying the numerous households, people conjured in their narratives similar disputes about land and resources, pointing to the derogatory language that was often used by state officials to describe the region’s social movements and its leaders. For instance, Juan José Chaux Mosquera, governor of the Cauca department from 2004 till 2007 and whose surnames carry the legacy of the colonial aristocracy, was known for declaring the indigenous movement and other popular organizations as “enemies of the state” (Rudquist and Anrup 2013:527).

Despite interests in obtaining benefits and titles from the Spanish Crown, these descriptions and other similar reports sent to the King, were perhaps better understood as a “finalists” strategy of interpretation (Todorov 1984:17-25). This meant reports were not so much about describing, but about illustrating or finding confirmation of a truth already possessed. Indeed, the derogatory characterization of peoples and the realization that rich mineral deposits were to be found in the Andes was interpreted by some Spaniards as clear evidence that God had intended these territories to be possessed by the Crown; every sign confirmed their conviction and became a means toward the realization of the missionary endeavor and their dreams of wealth. In the search for splendid riches and souls to redeem, the importance of the Province was almost given in advance to Belalcázar and his lieutenants. At these early stages of the conquest, such reports probably enticed and fueled the already well-known tales of a golden province known as el “El Dorado.” Wherever that “golden city” was, conquistadores of the Gobernación de Popayán were sure that they were getting closer.

While grinding gravels, like pepper seeds in a mortar, I remember asking Bertha about “El Dorado.” At first, she looked confused, she remembered being told at school that it had nothing to do with this region. Trying to intermeditate, Faviola interrupted elaborating her answer for me, “did it not had to do with a *Muisca* chief, who covered himself with gold dust to later submerged himself in a lagoon close to Bogotá?” she said dubious, but almost certain. “Could it be that this Dorado was actually somewhere around here?” I asked both of them attempting to provoke a connection between colonial histories of extraction and the construction of the northern Cauca region. Bertha and Faviola looked at each other in surprise: “I don’t know about that,” responded Bertha

remaining silent for a while. She then risked offering an interpretation: “Well, by the amount of black people there is in *Norte del Cauca*, you could say that this was one of those golden provinces the Spaniards dreamed of.”¹⁴ In a simple but powerful way, Bertha’s association between gold and black people summarized, as I will explain next, the forced labor regimes and racialized social order that came to prevail in this long-coveted Province of Popayán.

The Caloto mining district

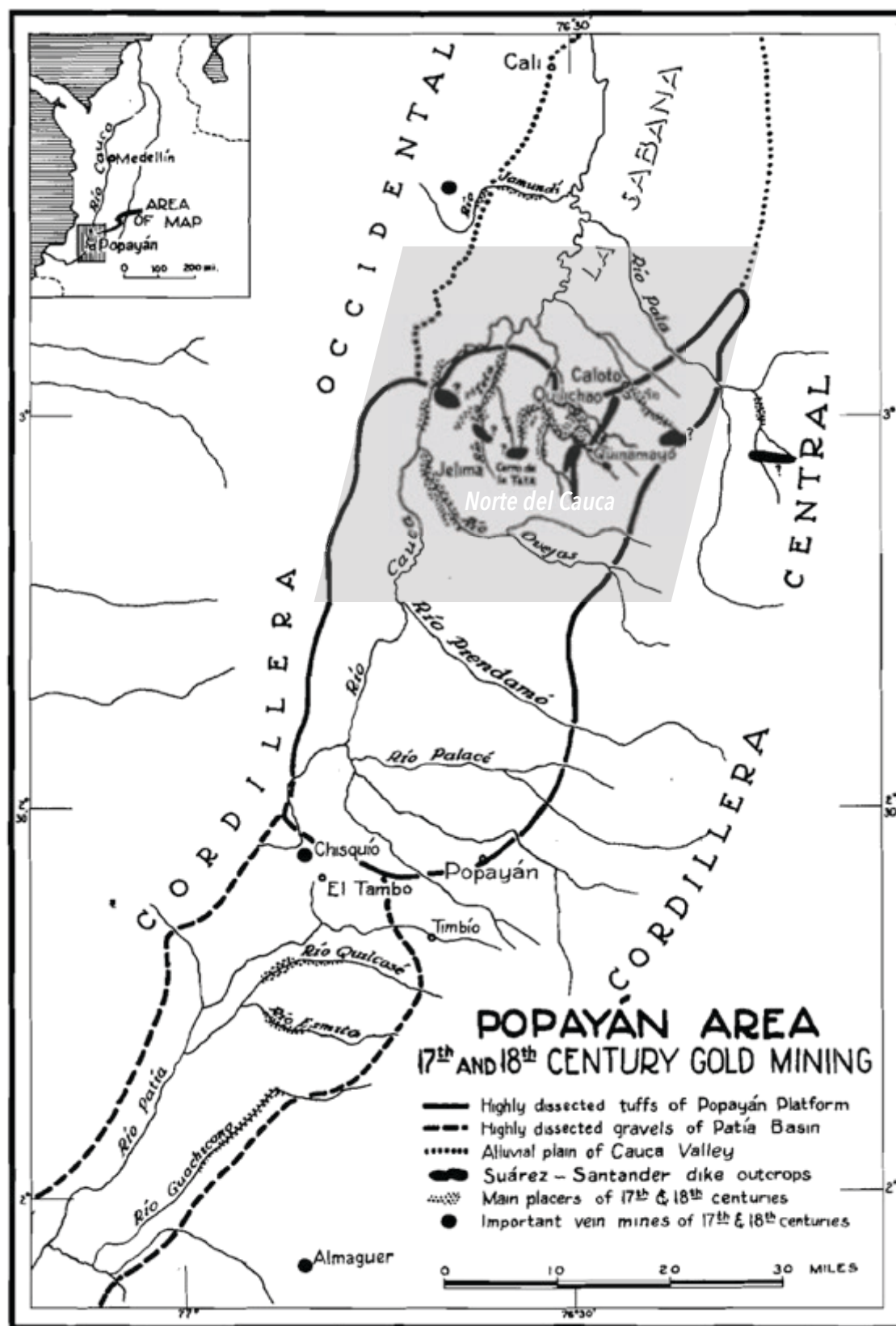
Broken terrain, intense local resistance and the lack of unified command among conquistadores, held the new Gobernación of Popayán economically marginal compared to the colonial economies of Quito, Lima, or Cartagena. However, the finding of gold mineral deposits in well-watered districts with relatively good soils, combined with introduction of enslaved labor, were to transform the Province —since the end of the sixteenth century— into an important outpost in the socioeconomic order of the Kingdom (Bryant 2006:83, West 1952:5, Padilla 1976, Marzahl 1978). In fact, during this time the Quito *audiencia* would become more dependent on Popayán’s gold, than on the southern silver districts (Lane 1996:57). Potosí continued to be an important market for Quito’s economy, but its *obraje* complex [wool textile production] began to be as closely tied to Popayán, as it was to the Peruvian highlands (Lane 1996:8).

The limits of the province and the location of towns, as well as its populations, changed constantly throughout the approximately 300 years of Spanish rule. Yet, the territory known today as *Norte del Cauca* corresponds roughly to the limits of the jurisdiction of the colonial city of Caloto, a place known in colonial Spanish America as *Las minas de adentro* (West 1952:11).¹⁵ Located some forty miles north of Popayán and

south of Cali, the boundaries of the sub-district were as usual not clear-cut. Since 1580s the rivers of Ovejas and Bolo were used as southern and northernmost limits (around 28 leagues). The Cauca River marked its westernmost line and the central cordillera, along the Negro River, the eastern limit (around 25 leagues) (ACC 2955 Col. C I -17 t). During the first conquest expeditions these lands were not the most desired by Spaniards. The proximity with the indomitable indigenous groups Paéces and their Pijao allies offered more troubles than labor force, or missionary opportunities. Yet, the numerous auriferous deposits found in most tributaries of the upper Cauca River were to change this landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, once most Paéces groups were militarily defeated and relocated, these lands became among the foremost gold producing sectors of the Popayán province (West 1952:13).

Traversing Colombia from the intricate rivers of the Pacific lowlands to the scarped mountains of the Andean cordillera, the cultural geographer Robert C. West tracked colonial “folk” mining techniques in the area (West 1952).¹⁶ According to his maps and other records (Ararat et al. 2013, Rojas 2014) early mining camps were located in the upper parts of the sub-district around Teta, Gelima and Ovejas Rivers, all tributaries of the Cauca River, and very close to where I encountered Bertha and Faviola (See Map 7).

Additional archival documents supplement these findings, allowing us to assume that from the late sixteenth century, formal mining settlements in the Caloto district were already established. There is evidence, for instance, of the existence of mines in the area of Gelima by 1605, not fortuitously registered to the great-grandson of the *adelantado* Belalcázar (ACC 8085 Col. P I 1-ne). These settlements were not comparable in size and



Map 7. Core of the Popayán Province showing Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Gold Mining areas. The map has been slightly modified to highlight approximately present-day area of Norte del Cauca, former Caloto mining district and jurisdiction. References to the mines of Gelima, as well mining areas in the riverbanks of Teta, Ovejas, and Quinamayo shown in the map would be constant along the text. Source: Robert C. West 1952. *Colonial Placer Mining in Colombia*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1952. Pag.12

production to the silver-mercury mines located in the Viceroyalty of Perú (Potosi, Oruro, Huancavelica, among others). They were generally smaller and sometimes even transitory or mobile due to the very nature of deposits (Colmenares 1997:118; Lane 1996: 346-381). However, *Libros de fundición* [royal smeltry ledgers], estimate the production of gold in the province circa 1580s around 300,000 *castellanos of gold*, that is to say around 3,000 lbs. (Restrepo 1886:74); The Gelima-Teta area alone averaging 75,000 pesos a year between 1564 and 1597 (West 1952:13). Such volume of production did not go unnoticed by the administrative center of Popayán, up in the plateau. Since 1572, there are numerous petitions from the capital of the Province asking to change the royal treasury and the official melting establishment from Cali to Popayán (ACC 808, 813-821 Col. C I -13 rc). Despite these requests, Cali kept control over the production from 1551 till 1643.

Additional fluvial and vein mines were also registered in lower areas near Quinamayo, La Jagua, Honduras, San Antonio, and Quilichao (West 1952:13; Navarrete 2005:155). For the Quinamayo river, there are records that point to the fact that there were at least five slave *cuadrillas* by 1680s —by regulation these were crews composed of at least five miners under the supervision of a captain, who usually was an elder enslaved—, and references to the whole mining area as a well-established *real de minas* (Marzahl 1978:25; ACC 9202 Col. E I -12 cap). This latter label, generally reserved for mining places where underground veins of high-grade ore necessitated the establishment of large mining centers, was used also in reference to mines such as Gelima, Domingillo, and Honduras. In any case, it could have been just nominal, since there was not an *alcalde* [mayor] that exercised control and authority over these mines.

Nevertheless, the existence of chapels and priests financed by mine owners, gives the idea of more or less large towns concerned with the “well-being” of their business and interested in controlling the populations that settled in their vicinity (Herrera 2009:185).

Allegedly due to the abuses related to mining labor, in 1542 the Crown’s New Laws and ordinances outlawed Indian slavery and restricted inheritance of *encomienda* grants up to two generations. From the standpoint of *encomenderos*, these Laws threaten the stability of an already precarious labor pool, and were, thus, fiercely contested along the provinces of the kingdom. In Perú, for instance, revolts were rapidly registered, and foreseeing similar responses the Laws were quickly halted in the New Granada (Colmenares 1987). On the long run, intra-elite struggles and the Crown’s own fears of losing the colony against the new elites of conquistadores and its descendants, allowed some room for maneuvering. Before compliance to the Crown mandates, it will be the expansion of Spanish settlements and the decrease of aboriginal population, what would put real pressure on *encomiendas* as forms of supply.

As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, some problems regarding provisions and food supplies will be partly solved with the integration and complementarity between *haciendas* and mines around the end of the seventeenth century and eighteenth century. As for the shrinking supply of labor, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, present in the Province at least since the late sixteenth century, offered a costly but promising option to supplement and strength the decaying forms of Indian forced labor. While some of the gold dust extracted from the rich deposits around Caloto was shipped, taxed, and traded in the city of Quito, presumably for local textiles, silver coming from Perú, and other commodities (Twinam 1982; Lane 2000) Cartagena, on the other corner of the Province,

offered access to the primary market of enslaved people in early colonial Spanish America.¹⁷

Complains, as that of friar Bartolomé de las Casas that required the Crown to end the Indian *encomienda* “as the despotic slavery it actually is” (de las Casas 1971:192) didn’t echo for African slavery. The holding and captivity of Black lives, on the contrary, offered less conscience troubles to Spaniards. For some, as the *oidor*, or judge, of the *audiencia de Quito* Francisco de Anuncibay it could even offer redemption:

The blacks would not be harmed; in fact it would be a service to them to be taken from Guinea, from that fire and tyranny and barbarity and brutality where without law and without God they live as savage brutes; but carried to a better land, healthier for them, and fertile, they would be happy at their salvation, allowed to live with order and religion [en policía y religion] and to secure many temporal benefits, and what is far more important, many spiritual ones (Anuncibay in Lane 2000: 341).

In this sense, as the Jesuit José de Acosta reflected on in his *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, gold rich tertiary gravels encouraged the settlement of “difficult and bleak and sterile places” (de Acosta 2000:165 in Scott 2006:1862). Still, it was not only the love of gold what rendered these places “soft and abundant and well populated;” it was also the love of god. Since late-sixteenth century, Jesuits demonstrated in Perú strong commitment to evangelizing indigenous and African enslaved people. But it took them nearly a century to reach the province of Popayán (Bryant 2014:168). In order to support their *colegios* [basically a secondary school to educate the urban colonial elite of Popayán] and their missionary work on what they considered the edges of Christendom, Jesuits soon established mines and haciendas in the province around 1630s (ACC/Sig. 4328 Col. C I -21 mn). The mines were located in Honduras and Gelima, spanning several leagues from the confluence of the Cauca and Ovejas rivers (Colmenares

1997:111,119). Here, approximately thirty families were distributed in 24 ranches, of which only few had a separate kitchen. The mines also had a forge and a place to store maize and other supplies, which were usually sent from the agro-pastoral haciendas that the Jesuits had in the lower parts of the valley between Caloto and Cali—a two-day journey approximately (for the hacienda-mine complex see chapter 2).

Though the mines were already in service before the Jesuits arrived—and some even had been instructed to take particular care with religious observances—, according to the Jesuit brother and historian Pedro de Mercado (1957), the spiritual conquest of the more than a hundred captives, posted in the camp, was still a pending task. Apparently, Spaniards were so obsessed with gold, the Jesuit argued, that they neglected to “instruct slaves in *los tesoros del cielo* [the treasures of heaven]” (Mercado 1957:28-30).

Nonetheless, the Jesuit mission was clear; making them good Christians “will make of them good servants” (Chevalier 1950:83). For slaves the day must have begun very early, probably gathering at dawn in the chapel for religious instruction, and then, after a long day of work, perhaps a nightly chanting of the rosary took place (Cushner 1982:136). These services had to be paid by slaves themselves, and their participation in communion and confession on Sundays was always expected.

But, not all residents of the province could afford the transition from *encomienda* grants to African slaves as the Jesuits did. Most historians concur that although new sources of mine labor began to be sought out, the transition was costly and difficult for local elites. As early as 1592, Governors and officials informed the King about the need to subsidize the import of enslaved Africans to the Province of Popayán to develop their mines (Andrade 1995:36, Lane 2000a: 240-241). Francisco de Anuncibay himself, called

upon the King to purchase, “one thousand two hundred men and eight hundred females older than seventeen years, although some should be at least forty, so others could follow and respect them” (Anuncibay in Andrade 1995:36). In his recommendations, Anuncibay argued that “there was no river or ravine in the province that did not carry gold,” and therefore there “was no other option but to seek to settle these sites with black slaves, organized carefully in mining camps, or *pueblos*” (Anuncibay in Andrade 1995:37). According to Anuncibay, with these much-needed reinforcements local mine owners, as himself, would easily reimburse the Crown in payments, at interest.

The transition did not happen as fast as Anuncibay would have wanted. Approximately, only 300 “blacks” were said to be working in the gold mines of the Gobernación of Popayán between 1560 and 1573 (Ponce Leiva 1992:221), and most of them were probably working in the sites of Buriticá and Anserma up north in the province (Twinam 1982). Indeed, *encomienda* Indian labor was still in use in 1620 in the mines of La Teta (*Norte del Cauca*) and remained active in frontier mines as Barbacoas in the Pacific Lowlands till the end of the seventeenth century (Lane 1996:60, Lane 2000b).

By the numerous demands sent to the King Philip II, and his successors, it is possible to assume that the Crown dismissed the urgency of such petitions, or simply refused to subsidize local elites as a way to prevent possible threats to its power. Almost a century after the establishment of the province and after the proclamation of the law prohibiting “Indian slavery” Juan Rodriguez Fresle kept asking for assistance:

This new kingdom possesses an immense power in its mines and rich deposits from which great treasures have been and continue to be sent to Spain; more metal and of a better quality could be mined if the miners were aided as they should be, and this assistance is greatly needed at the

present time as the larger part of the natives have died (Fresle in Restrepo 1886:207-208).

Drawing on port entry records in Cartagena de Indias, the seaport that received more captives than any other Spanish American trade hub, it can be assumed that between 1573 and 1640 a minimum of 487 slave ships arrived disembarking at least 78,453 enslaved Africans (Wheat 2011:2).¹⁸ It is difficult to establish from the records the exact date mine owners in the Popayán province started using this imported enslaved labor, but it is probable that Caloto exploitations were among the first mining areas within the *audiencia* of Quito to take advantage of this market, or at least that tried to promote it (Lane 1996:60).¹⁹

Gaspar Rodas, acting in 1587 as governor of the north part of the province of Popayán (Antioquia), offered in an *ordenanza* benefits for mine owners who had in their crews at least five African miners (Navarrete 2005:160). A letter from the Council of the Indies to Philip II, also encouraged sending “blacks” to Popayán since “there is no doubt that such lands are perfectly suited to the housing and conservation of the blacks,” because its climate is similar to those found “below the torrid zone in the Kingdoms of Guinea” (Lane 2000a:240). The letter added that the region could “provide in abundance the staples that blacks crave [*apetecer*], which are rice, maize, tobacco, fish, squash [*zapallo*], yucca, and other vegetables” (Lane 2000a:240).

Historian Peter Marzahl has found evidence of the shift to enslaved labor in the province as early as 1620s, when *encomenderos* and merchants made deals to combine both forced labor regimes (Marzahl 1978:45,46). On the one hand, Cristóbal Mosquera bought thirteen African captives to supplement the work in his mines on the Teta River and Gelima. Marzahl also finds that by 1633 Mosquera increased the number up to forty

and planned to acquire more by placing five thousand gold pesos in safekeeping. The deal included “males and females, children and adults,” not only to work in the mines, but also to work at his home in Popayán. On the other hand, Captain Juan de Mera and merchant Lorenzo Roldan united forces to work near the Teta River too. The former contributed with twenty enslaved Africans, and the latter with ten native miners. Apparently, these moves exerted pressure on other mining operations nearby where captured and resettled Indians (*Paéces*) were reported to the *audiencia* the Quito in 1628 as being “difficult to control” (Lane 1996:60).

In the mines of Gelima, a mining partnership relocated in 1634 twenty-two African captives—men and women with their iron *almocafres* and *barras*— that were already working on the Ovejas River, and added twenty more between natives and enslaves, to work there for a six years period (Ararat et.al. 2013:24; Marzahl 1978:46). Eventually, enslaved labor force outnumbered Indian miners. By the 1650s, Marzahl finds only six Indian mining gangs versus fifteen slave gangs and two of combined forces (Marzahl 1978:27). In the Quinamayo river alone at least four slave gangs were reported in 1660s (Bryant 2006:101-102). Historian Enriqueta Vila Vilar (1976) notes that a mid-seventeenth century estimate of slave populations counted 5,000 slaves in Popayán compared to some 6,500 in the rest of the kingdom of Quito. These African captives, referred in the record as *negros de batea* [black panners], were mainly destined to gold mining activities (Vila Vilar 1976:176).

Short references to the ways these mining settlements were arranged appear in the archival records. Thanks to a court case against a woman who killed her husband, we can appreciate the conditions of enslaved crews owned by the *Monasterio del Carmen* and

the type of mining settlement in the area circa 1837 (ACC 79 / Rep. J I -3 cr). According to the report, and contrary to the dormitory-like structures for slaves in Perú (Cushner 1982), in these mining camps, slave huts were organized around a chapel, and were under the command of a captain, who usually was an experienced and trusted enslaved. *Una vara*, an old Spanish unit of length equivalent to approximately 33 inches, separated each shack from one another. Slaves were described as living in stable unions, following perhaps Francisco de Anuncibay's advise of making sure that "the slaves [miners] are married to black women, because matrimony is the surest means of taming and pacifying the black man" (Anuncibay in Lane 2000: 242). Both arrangements suited the "reproductive" and "pacifying" purposes of enslave owners (ACC 79, Rep. J I -3 cr). Furthermore, mine owners were obliged to use from one third to half of their *cuadrillas* to cultivate the hillside plots.

Besides the campground, mining grants could cover large territories and could include many rivers. For instance, by 1730s there are registers showing the granting of mining rights to Popayán residents over the mountains of Minadala, Marilópez, and Damian. These rights included not only the *labores* and *assequias de antiguos* [improvements and ditches made by ancients], but also all waters, hills, cliffs and plains till the Cauca River (ACC / 3408 Col. C I -21 mn; ACC / 3701 Col. C I -21 mn). The same mine owner registered in 1737 mines also in Chontaduro, Gelima la alta, and Inguító, all of them tributaries of the Cauca River on its western side. The total area of both mining operations measured approximately 200 square kilometers. The extension of these claims indicated, not only how in colonial legislation a mine owner regularly could

claim all rights to waters above and below his discovery, but also indicated the mobile character of the mining business; always in the look for new deposits.

Inventory and appraisals of all the properties in Gemila circa 1815, required by the Governor of the Province, in order to collect five per cent of the properties of all individual, allow us to see an example of the organization and extension of *haciendas* and mining camps in the area around that time (ACC / 307 Ind. C I -4 h). The cattle *hacienda* owned by Don José María Mosquera holds a special place in this inventory. The manager of the *hacienda* stated that it included, four *hatos* [cattle ranches], one mine, and one site described as a *bodega* [shed]. Each *hato* included at least two slaves described either as old, sick, or short. The mayor concentration and infrastructure was held in La Teta, where there were three *casas paxisas* [straw houses], sixty-four *piezas de esclavos útiles* [utile salves], seventy-seven *piezas de chusma* [not directly engaged in mining activities, either by age or disable], and twelve *piezas inútiles* [useless] (I explore the contemporary situation of La Teta in chapter 4 and 5). In the mine named *Ensolbado*, no house was reported because it was damaged, but twenty-two more *esclavos útiles*, forty-four *piezas de chusma*, and four old slaves were registered.

However, these appraisals should be taken with caution. The encounter of mining sites and names in the archival record (e.g. Gelima), should not be taken as index of the existence of a single mine owner, no less of their ability to monopolize and control production. Since these claims and grants were usually so extensive, it was possible to find the subletting and even the selling of some areas, avoiding thus regulations, taxes and records. Competing miners whom did not have titles, or individual *mazamorreros*

and *barequeros* [gold panners] in areas abandoned by slaveholders also doted the landscape (West 1952:89-90; Twinam 1982).

The increasing demand of enslaved labor, especially in mining operations, thus contributed as well to reorganizations in Spanish settlements. Contrary to patterns of residence imposed by the system of *encomienda*, which prevented (at least on paper) from relocating native labor, owners of enslaved crews were autonomous to decide their allocation according to mining interests (Marzahl 1978:7). As the historian Kris Lane has argued, “African captives were mobile capital” (Lane 2000a:227). This practice, not only turned some towns into a collection of a few huts, but also allowed, thanks to this new “mobile” labor force, the formation of new settlements in promissory mining zones.²⁰ In the meantime, new small settlements along the streams of various rivers of the jurisdiction were growing rapidly. Even mine owners from other regions as far as Anserma and Buriticá moved their mining crews to the Caloto district around 1620 (Marzahl 1978:7, 25).

The burgeon of these mining camps must have been such, that by 1697 they caught the attention of royal officers in Popayán, demanding the Lieutenant General of Caloto to collect the *alcabalas reales* (a sales tax up to six percent), and administer them in the territory of his jurisdiction (ACC 2486 Col. C I -22 h). After all, the production of the district, added to the mines in the Pacific lowlands, now fully integrated to the province, would amount to half of the gold production in the whole *Nueva Granada*. Taking into consideration the fact that miners could easily avoid smelting house records and taxes, it is possible to argue that the production could have been even greater.²¹ These favorable conditions gave substance to small urban nuclei that eventually ended up

aspiring to have their own parish and judge, and even later aspire to municipal autonomy. The villa of Quilichao, which arose in spite of the powerful mine owners of Popayán, exemplifies this development (see chapter 5).

Finally, without subsidized options to import enslaved Africans to develop the province's gold mines, local elites focused on accumulating capital from remaining *encomiendas*, breaking the rules that supposedly restricted using them as profit-making tools. Moreover, *encomienda* and slavery were not so much phases or stages that were going to replace one another. On the contrary, they were in early colonial times interdependent systems of forced labor regimes and exploitation (Bryant 2006:84). Surprisingly, instead of being a complete obstacle to capitalist development as some scholars have argued, *encomiendas* managed to provide a bridge to slave-based economy (Lane 2000b:73), which in turn contributed as well to the reorganizations of Spanish settlement patterns in the region due to its mobile character. In other cases as the Jesuits enterprises, finding God through gold encouraged the captivity of black lives and the settlement of “difficult and bleak and sterile places” offering less conscience troubles to Spaniards.

Finding gold, forming belonging

Contextual aspects lie not only in larger processes of colonialism and early mercantilist development, they also run many miles deep in the ground. I came to wonder about this geologic dimension when I asked Roberto what it meant for him to be “descendants of the rocks,” as Bertha had suggested to me when I first met her. Completely puzzled, this experienced miner from Tamboral, in Mindala, dismissed my question as inappropriate.

Almost teaching me “how to ask” (Briggs 1984), he recommended me instead to pay attention to gold mining techniques. In this section, I explore how mining techniques, tools, and materials are related to a whole series of practices that shape life beyond earning a living. I argue, that paying attention to the spatially and materially defined practices of mining can help to counterbalance interpretative approaches in anthropology that focus exclusively on a symbolic order that is imposed over the world, or that reduce it to a purely discursive texture. I am interested here, following the work of Tim Ingold (2000), in the mutually constitutive process of humans and non-humans acting and experiencing in the world.²² Here as, Marx said, “not only the materials with which he works are transformed”, but also “the worker, too, is changed through the experience” (Marx in Ingold 2011: 6). What is at stake is not a straight separation of the material from the symbolic, but an “intricate metabolism,” as Marx insisted, that mixes and remakes both in the process.

Roberto was one of the last miners I stopped to visit, as I hiked up from the house of Faviola in her company. He was working on his edible garden under the shade of *cachimbo* and guava trees when we encountered him. With tired red eyes, and adjusting his cap, Roberto agreed to chat with us arguing that he might have one or two things to say about how black families worked the mines.

Gathered in a small porch in Roberto’s *bahareque* house, Faviola and I waited while he cleaned up to chat with us. His wife, Aurora, came to greet us. She asked Freddy, her youngest son, to move the motorcycle parked in the doorway and arranged a couple chairs before disappearing in the darkness of the one-room house. Roberto and his wife Aurora described themselves as *agromineros* [farmers and miners]. They worked the

land, but they also take advantage of the mines combining the two labors depending on the luck, the rain, and the availability and restrictions of explosives.²³ Of their three male sons, two have continued working in the mines and were not present that day, but Freddy had different dreams. Later he would show me a kite he was building and dreamed of trying it with the winds of August.

“My ancestors lived in Gelima, crossing the river,” said Roberto coming out of the dark and helping his son to move the motorcycle and offering us the best chairs. His arms, still kept sign of might and skill. “It must have been around 1800s, because it was my great-great-grandmother. That was when there were tigers and bears around here,” he said while still standing.

I turned to Faviola, who sat beside me. Her smile was unmistakable. “Did they hunt those animals back then,” I asked impressed.

“No, *salian era a perderse* [they just run away to hide],” Roberto said.

“So, you were saying that your great-great-grandmother,” intervened Faviola, thankfully bringing me back from my fantasy.

“Oh yes, her name was Cristina Lucumí, but there were also Mina, Carabalí and Ambuila [last names]. She was very religious, of that I am sure. I don’t know if it had to do with the Jesuits that you are asking for, but she liked to sing songs *al niño Dios* [baby God]. Since we were kids, she took us to the *adoraciones* to dance, but I was shy, so I didn’t dance, I just listened. What I really wanted to do was to play with the musicians,” Roberto told us referring to the groups composed of guitars, violin, and drums, that usually accompany the festivities.

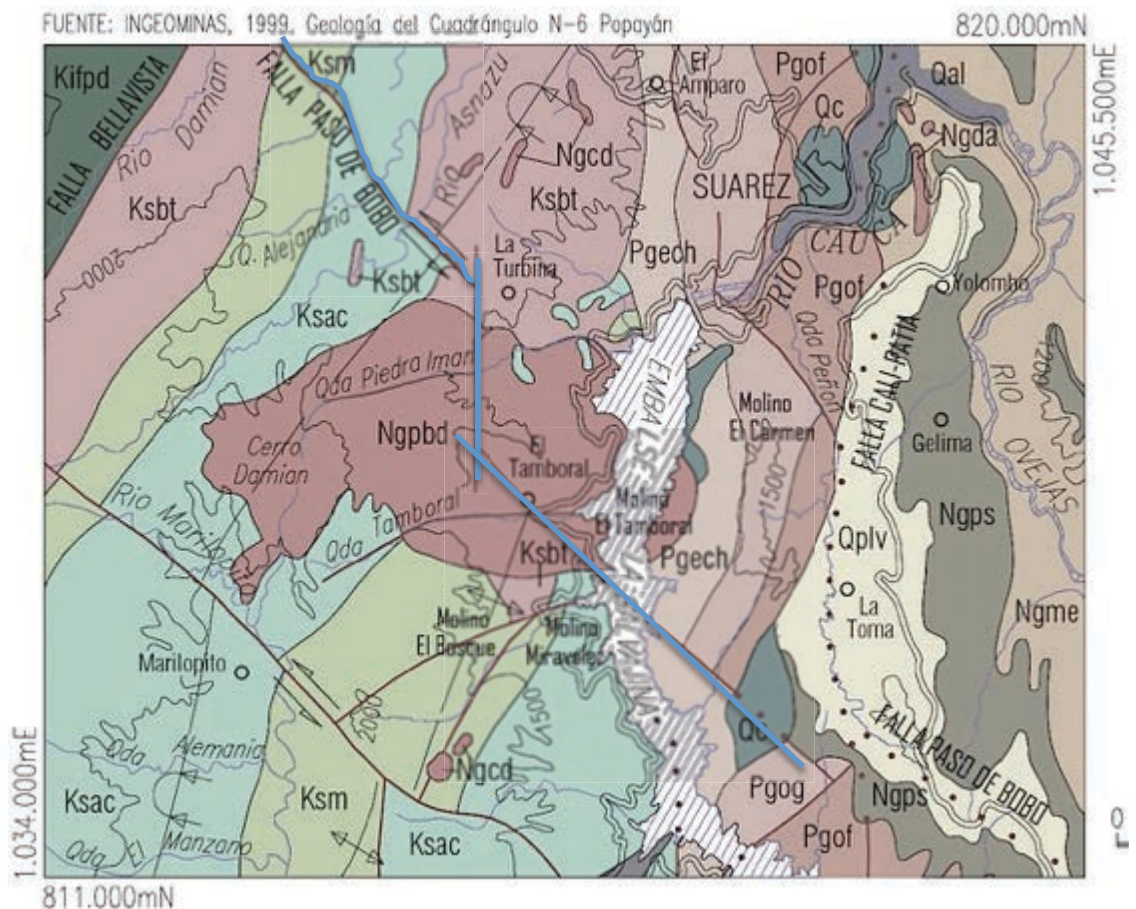
“She used to cross the river in *Paso Bobo*, right where you were born Faviola,” Roberto said, while looking at her as if he could remember her childhood. “There were canoes and makeshift bridges in other parts. But I guess *Paso Bobo* was preferred, because we had family there too, and it was a good place to look for gold washing the sands with *bateas* [shallow wooden bowls],” Roberto said slowly looking at my notebook, as if he was pausing on purpose to allow me time to write everything down. “My mother used to tell me that my great-great-grandmother crossed frequently towards Suárez, although the town didn’t exist at that time, it was called Portugalete. You have to consider that these were horseshoe paths only,” he said.

Much of the interaction between hills and rivers that Roberto was recalling when mentioning the *Paso Bobo* area, had probably its roots in the coexistence since colonial times, of mining camps and *haciendas*. In the absence of towns, these sites constituted the principal settlement units in the region. “In fact,” Roberto continued, “my great-great grandmother always returned from *Paso Bobo* with more than gold; she came with fish, yucca, plantains, and sometimes, even coffee that grew in the shores of the river.” As it happened with *Paso Bobo* years ago, Faviola’s house is today a meeting point for local people and travelers. Rebuilt above the water level and near the unpaved road arranged by the hydroelectric project, her house works as a *chiva* [local bus] stop for miners and locals, and at the same time, as a site for community meetings, board games and dances.

The name *Paso Bobo*, literary translated ‘foolish passage,’ was probably meant to describe an easy cross over the risky upper Cauca River. However, since early colonial times, crossing waters in this part of the country was anything but foolish or easy.²⁴ Indeed, before the dam, the difficulty of these passageways over the Cauca River and its

tributaries was well known. In fact, the *cronista* [chronicler] Cieza de León warned travelers to cross these rivers during the rainy season (Cieza de León 2000[1550]:151).

Three centuries later things were not different. In the late nineteenth-century, after leaving behind the gold mountains of La Teta and Quilichao, the French traveler M. ED. André describes how he almost lost his life in his descent on mule to the rumorous Ovejas River. The same river that an hour later will smash him between rocks and rapids, and will sink him in its muddy shores before releasing him evicted (Wiener, C., et al. 1998[1884]:721).



Map 8. Geology of quadrangle N-6, Popayán. Source, INEOMINAS 1999. Modified by the author to shown the *Paso Bobo* fault.

But the geological forces that had compressed the rocks in these landforms and produced the rifts and rivers that travelers experienced and miners profited, had also its part in the naming of *Paso Bobo* as a especial place for gold prospecting. As the mining geologist professor told me holding passing to me his rock paperweight: “The region is crossed in this section by a Fault that bares the same name [Paso Bobo], and is related to the Miocene period and the activity of the Nazca Plate Tectonic” (See Map 8). How the name came to be on geologic charts, or how did such geodynamical setting ended up naming places, is difficult to establish. Chances are, geologists arrived later and simply took the name from the place where the fault surfaces.

But what takes a geologist to such distant places? The first mention of the fault in geological literature, also referred as Suárez Stock (by the name of the municipality), dates from 1978, not fortuitously a year before the construction of the hydroelectric project began.²⁵ The characteristics of this Fault, that has direction Northwest and crosses also the Western Mountain range, are not very evident in the field—at least not in present day. Yet, its geological force, capable of breaking up mountains and bestrewing the gold in the gravels of streams, must have been felt both in pre-Hispanic and colonial times. Nowadays, inhabitants of Mindala use four mining areas: La Turbina, Tamboral, Maravélez and Desquite. In the first two, rocks are composed of diorite mainly, and in the two remaining basalts are more common. The veins are thin, but the quartz-gold mineralization makes them evident to the naked eye.

Aurora seemed anxious to tell her story too. By the time Roberto was recounting his great-great grandmother routes, Aurora had taken out some mining tools to show us, and was already wearing Roberto’s yellow mining helmet. “In my family we all grew up

mining,” she said taking the stance. “My mother used to take me to the river since I was a little child. I remember using the *batea* [shallow wooden bowl] as a ship and gathering stones to build pools. Playing around and imitating her, I learned,” said Aurora. “In fact,” Aurora said pausing dramatically, “I have another hypothesis for the naming of *Paso Bobo*; I was hearing you, and I think it might be related to mining techniques too.” We all listened to her carefully while she passed her *batea* along (See Figures 5 and 6) “My husband is *minero de filón* [vein miner] but I am *barequera* [gold panner], and if you are going to *barequear* you don’t want a furious current, you want to find a place in the river with slow and shallow waters. In other words, you want *un paso bobo del agua* [a silly passage of water] where the heavy gold dust can settled,” she said.

Aurora then explained directly: “In winter times we benefited from agriculture and logging, but in summer the Cauca River was our livelihood. There we had long beaches to pan for gold and the fishery in the puddles was excellent. For me, gold is a blessing from water,” she said proudly putting her hands on her hips. I realized in that moment that mining was, after all, as dependent on water as agriculture was.

In colonial times, gold-bearing gravels and loose sands, as those found along the streams of rivers in the Caloto district, were called *placeros*. The choosing of the name was not casual in any way. The Spanish word *placer*, which commonly means, “pleasure,” was also a nautical term for “sand banks.” One of the advantages of *Norte del Cauca* mining area (in colonial times referred as Caloto and Quilichao mining districts) was in fact the existence of numerous watercourses and streams that facilitated the washing and flotation of gold-bearing gavel and sands, which according to West, was the prevailing mode of gold exploitation in the New Granada (West 1952:52).



Figures 5 and 6. A miner was carving this wooden *batea* when I stopped to visit him. He told me that most important thing was to choose the right wood: “it should be of good quality, never to twist or crack, even if it is kept in the water for a long time and then left under the sun for the rest of the day.” One of the woods used for *bateas* is classified as *Laure-cacho*; close in strength to Oak. Photographs by the author.

This is still truth for nowadays. As Aurora and many other miners in Mindala knew separating gold from sands was a good deal easier than digging and extracting it out of subterranean lodes and ancient rock veins. “*Mucho antes de que encharcaran el río* [long before the river was flooded] for making the reservoir, we didn’t need to tunnel into the earth in search for the vein,” Aurora explained.²⁶ “Instead, when my grandmother was not chopping straw to sell in Suárez, she used to go to the river. *Allí se zambullía* [There she jumped into the water] and shovel after shovel of sand she washed gold only using her *batea* [wooden bowl].” Nowadays in summer time, it is still very common to find people *barequehando* [panning] in the shores of the lake and its affluent rivers. Submerging their *bateas* into the gold-bearing sands, *barequeros* use centrifugal movements to separate gold from water and sand. “But the belief among miners at that time,” Aurora added, “was that the deeper you went into the river, the better the gold. Even people from Honduras came here. It was that good,” she said.

Faviola remembered this *placer* very well too. Before the dam, her mother’s house, as that of Aurora, was located near the river alongside crops like plantains, yucca *arracacha*, maize, papaya and beans. “I was only a little girl, but you and my elder brothers used to play together by the grinder of Paso Bobo, do you remember.” she asked Aurora. “Of course, we practically grew up there. We all gathered at your mother’s place in Paso Bobo,” Aurora recalled with joy. “My father was the farmer in the family,” added Faviola, “he used to sell *canastados* [full baskets] of papayas, but when he died the family took shelter in mining. I remember that my mother took all of us to *barequear* [panning] with her, but it was *muy cansón* [very tiring], it required lots of patience and caused a lot of pain in the lower back and waist. I took my grams out, but *uno se mata feo*

[its very hard work]. We had to walk all the way to Buenos Aires, because the sale and commerce of gold was not here in Suárez as happens nowadays, it was in Buenos Aires [approx. 25 kilometers away],” concluded Faviola almost with discomfort.

While lighting a small piece of *mecha* [wick] to show me how things were done with *pólvora* [gunpowder], Roberto interrupted her: “That’s another thing; you have gold from *filón* and gold from *aluvión*. People sometimes think they are different, and well they demand different techniques, but they are the same gold. Who do you think gave us the gold found in running streams? Where does it come from? I used to think that it was just there, waiting, but it comes from the *veta* [vein], it is the same *filón*.”

Aurora concurred with his husband passing him a long chisel as a way to try to gain the stand again by making him busy with the tools (see Figure 7). “The river is practically teaching us how to mine,” she managed to say. Roberto kept his breath for a while and let her continue. “When the rivers cross over the *veneros* [veins], and if they come *crecidos* [literally grown, mighty], they hit the lodes with their rocks and erode the vein, the *filón*. Eventually, the sands and the rocks will purify the gold till it is free,” she said.

Overlapping Aurora and reiterating his own words, Roberto tried to return to his point: “I was telling you that *filón* and *aluvión* are the same, what happens is that surface gold is now damaged, people damaged it. That is why I prefer vein mining, but it takes all your strength, *es muy berraco destapar eso* [is very hard to uncover that].” He paused for a moment, then added: “Now, something different is if you want the water to do the job for you. Then you need to build small reservoirs and *canalones* [canals],” he said suggesting to replicate artificially the process of natural erosion described by Aurora.



Figure 7. Roberto didn't use *los fierros* (iron tools) anymore; he was "retired." He used the word laughing because "nobody retires in these places," he said. "You always have to keep working." Photographs by the author.

The canals Roberto was describing, actually existed since early date —probably around 1630s— in the mines of Gelima and la *La Teta*, on the other side of the artificial lake where I encountered Roberto and Aurora (Marzahl 1978:45, Mina 2008:20, Ararat et.al. 2013:76-78). Three years after the expulsion of the Jesuits from the kingdom, in 1767, a mission sent to Gelima to prospect the wealth and conditions of the mines. They found indeed a surprising system in place:

...we went with land surveyors who also knew how to work mines and we took the black captain and other necessary blacks. And we inspected eight *frentes* [mines] in the *cortes* [mining areas] that they work, and on each of these fronts we had them searched in three different parts to make sure what these fronts had and besides them we also recognized other fronts. Once we examined the *pintas*, we also surveyed the extension of the mineral deposit, which covered from the Gelima River, where they work presently, till the Cauca River where they also manifest to work. We recognized the *acequia* [water ditch] with which they work the mine from its *toma* [intake], and in the summer, as it is at present [it was the month of July], it only has waters for one cut, for which they have sent the rest workers to *jornales*, as they were used to do every year, leaving in the cuts only those who can be supported by the scare water that exists. In the winter they manifest to have enough water to work all the cuts, making use of the water collected in *estancos* [sort of tanks] (...) [In fact], every useful slave [regularly above 16] had their own iron bar to work (inventory of Gelima circa 1770 in Colmenares 1997:114).

On a hazy morning, while crossing the lake in the ferry service, granted to residents of Mindala after their strong opposition to the energy company that runs the Dam, Faviola insisted me that I should take a week or two to visit La Toma: “They are our example, not only in terms of political organization, because they certainly *la tienen clara* [to know how things really are, mainly politically speaking], but also in terms of how things were here before this lake happened,” she said while the ferry was picking up young boys and girls in their school uniforms. One month after my encounters with Bertha, Roberto and Aurora, I followed Faviola’s advice and went to La Toma. After all,

the reverence Faviola exhibited for their leaders surpassed ordinary respect. But then, La Toma, was no ordinary town. It was, as Faviola told me, their local “symbol of resistance.” No other town exemplified as well the imaginary of belonging and its force against multinationals or the State, as La Toma had in recent years (See Chapter 4).²⁷

The unpaved road wound around, avoiding the reservoir, but the trip was short when done by local motorcycle taxis. Renewing contacts from my predissertation fieldwork I managed to gain access to *una mina a tajo abierto* [open pit mine] on the side of the road. Different from gold panners, which benefit from sands and deposits on riverbeds, here on dry mountaintops it was difficult to get the water to do the job for you. However, on this site miners had managed to channel water from creeks and reservoirs nearby directing it to excavate the desired pay dirt (see Figure 8). There I met Arley, a *picador* [pike user] that was about to knockdown a gullied piece of auriferous clay to dump it into a *canalón* [sluice]. Ground sluicing miners in La Toma usually divided the labor assigning heavy work with the iron bar, *picas* [pike], *azadones* [hoes], and shovels to men. The scraping of angles and the bottom of *canalones* are left to women. This latter scraping is mainly done with the assistance of *almocafres*, like the one Bertha showed me in my first visit. A sluice box can be added in the process, which is distinguishable because it is usually veneered with expanded metal that helps to create turbulence in the flowing water while trapping ore particles within el *balastro* [gravels]. These gravels are washed several times until *ripio* is obtained. In the process, *bateas* can also be used in the last stages to wash out the fine residues.²⁸



Figure 8. Ground sluicing miners in La Toma, Suárez. Photographs by the author.

When I asked Arley if he knew about the old hydraulic works referenced in the archival record, he answered immediately: “Why do you think the town was called that way?” He paused for a moment allowing me to speculate, then he added: “La Toma, was named after a water intake that was constructed long time ago up in the hill.” According to his oral testimony, water was taken from a distant creak in Morales (about 10 kilometers) and was channeled throughout *acequias* over several *predios* and *fincas* till a small reservoir that was intended to help washing down the mines of Yolombo and Gelima.

“But, now, if you are lucky enough you can buy a water pump and work in high slopes or ridges,” expressed Arley, while directing me towards a red hill scattered with gray and white stones. “Then, with a monitor you can hit the mountain, shooting water at it, and then the rest is easy,” he said. When I approached to the site that was being worked, the first thing I saw was how red muddy waters were in effect allowed to spill downslope washing the gold in long *canalones*. Greeting the miners working the lodes, Arley explained me: “they are following the vein, it is distinguishable by its singular color you will see, but if the vein runs deep in the earth then we need to open *socavones* [tunnels and subterranean shafts] to track it down. Miners know when they are close on account of the colors and consistencies of the minerals they find,” he said.

According to the cultural geographer Robert West, Spaniards came to the New World poorly trained in mining methods. Not only most of them were soldiers and adventurers, but also had probably overlooked the early sixteenth century techniques that Georgius Agricola described in his *De Re Metallica* (West 1952:52,68). Explaining gold metallurgy in Lusitania —modern Portugal and adjacent regions in Spain—, Agricola

compiled in 1556 techniques from panning gold to ground sluicing and lode mining (see Figures 9 and 10).

Whether conquistadors, remembered or not the ancient techniques of northwest Spain, they certainly were ready to learn and adapt their subject's techniques for removing land and channeling water: both from native origin and from enslaved populations brought from Africa. On the one hand, even before the incursion of the Spaniards in the 1530s, gold mining was an important activity for late pre-Hispanic societies, including "egalitarian" ones (Langebaeck 2008). Not only were some of these societies outstanding goldsmiths, but also had developed techniques that rivalry those present in *De Re Metallica*. On the other hand, there is archival evidence supporting the idea that Spaniards also had preference for highly skilled enslaved African labor, most notably those which had a prior knowledge or expertise in panning, digging, and processing gold (Mauer 2008; Hall 2005; Josiah 2011; Zapata 1989:65).

In her work on slavery and African descendants in the Americas, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has insisted that mining was another important technology transferred from Africa to the Americas (Hall 2005). In the same way, as preference for expertise in certain plantation tasks existed on southern rice plantations in the U.S. (Gomez 1998, Carney 2001) and on sugar estates in northeastern Brazil (Schwartz 1985), by the middle of the sixteenth century, Hall argues that "Gold Coast Africans and other Africans skilled in the production and processing of gold, could have been especially sought out for the gold producing regions of northern Spanish America" (Hall 2005:122).



Figures 9 and 10. Source: Georgius Agricola (1950 [1556]) *De Re Metallica*, translated by Hoover and Hoover.

“Some people wash this kind of sand in a large bowl which can easily be shaken, the bowl being suspended by two ropes from a beam in a building. The sand is thrown into it, water is poured in, then the bowl is shaken, and the muddy water is poured out and clear water is again poured in, this being done again and again. In this way, the gold particles settle in the back part of the bowl because they are heavy, and the sand in the front part because it is light (...). Miners frequently wash ore in a small bowl to test it. This bowl, when shaken, is held in one hand and thumped with the other hand” (Agricola 1950:335-336).



“(...) [Another] method is also employed in the regions, which the Lusitanians hold in their power and sway, and is not dissimilar to the last. They drive a great number of deep ditches in rows in the gullies, slopes, and hollows of the mountains. Into these ditches the water, whether flowing down from snow melted by the heat of the sun or from rain, collects and carries together with earth and sand, sometimes tin-stone, or, in the case of the Lusitanians, the particles of gold loosened from veins and stringers. As soon as the waters of the torrent have all run away, the miners throw the material out of the ditches with iron shovels, and wash it in a common sluice box” (Agricola 1950:347).

The existence of Spaniards preference in the selection of skilled African miners can be found in the archival sources of Popayán. A “*visita de despacho*” from 1712 documents the overall physical condition of 166 captives recently “imported” (ACC Notaria Primera, tomo 22, 1713, folios 63—68v). Attention was paid to body art and scarification equated by Spaniards as “country marks” and “castas.” Most enslaved arriving in Popayán’s market throughout the eighteenth century were designated as Mina, Arara [sometimes Ararat], Caravalí, Lucumí, Congo, and Zetre [sometimes Cetre] (Bryant 2014:134-148). Apparently, the country marks Mina [mine] from Upper Guinea and Arara from Bight of Benin, —which accounted for almost 50 percent of the total registered in the 1712 shipment—, were highly valued for their promoted familiarity with the alluvial gold mining and their developed metallurgical techniques (Colmenares 1997:114). Whatever these pretended “country marks” meant to enslaved people, their codification by Spaniards represented an attempt to read in the bodies, not only possible health issues, but also the diverse origins and skills of these man and women.

In the autumn of 1823 the British government sent colonel J.P Hamilton as head of a commission to investigate the newly constituted state of Colombia. From his narratives through the interior provinces, we can appreciate the knowledge and expertise in panning, digging and finding gold of the slaves that worked at Arboleda’s mine in the Quinamayo River:

The working negroes, from long experience, know immediately, on examining the earth or clay, whether it contains much ore. For some time a great number of them are employed in digging the earth and crumbling it, and then by means of a channel of water, artificially brought along the side of the hill, the earth is moistened, and the gold, from its weight, falls to the bottom of the channel, the lighter particles being carried away by the current, which is contrived so as always to run with the same degree of velocity. The stones are then picked out by the women. The canal before us

was dug on the third stratum of earth, called *peña*, from its being a soft rocky stone, and the sides and bottom were kept smooth, to prevent the gold dust being lost in the crevices. After the stones were taken out, and the earth carried off by the water, there remained in the canal gold dust, very small stones, a quantity of sand, and particles of iron. All these substances so deposited are collected in large wooden bowls (Hamilton 1827:121-123).

But this “working negroes” expertise was not only expressed in water works and canals. It also was expressed in knowledge about plants and their assistance in separating gold:

The women take a small quantity of the above ingredients into their *bateas*, and shake them about very skillfully on the surface of the water, taking care to get rid of the extraneous substances, and retaining in the *batea* the gold dust, mixed with fine sand. As this sand is very small, and specifically heavier than the water, the miners, in order to thicken the water, mix with it a certain herb, which is generally found in the mining districts, and by its means separate the gold from the sand in the following manner. They place the ore in a kind of basin or pan, made of a hide, inclining it gently towards one of the *bateas*; they then pour softly and gradually this decoction of the herb over the gold and sand, which, carrying the sand with it into the *batea*, leaves the pure gold in the basin of hide. Then a piece of lighted wood is brought to a negress, who dries the gold, and puts it into paper. Such was the process we witnessed at Mr. Arboleda’s mines (Hamilton 1827:121-123).

After walking through the ground sluice-mining site, Arley would explain to me that the herb described by Hamilton, belonged indeed to a long list of traditions used by black miners to separate gold particles without employing mercury or other chemicals. He named plants as *la escobita*, and *la babosa*, but explained me that lemon, saliva, and urine could work as well.

Since colonial times, gold-vein mining was considered as a much more complex activity than stream placering. In fact, most gold produced in the Caloto district came

from placers that didn't require an extra effort to crush and wash unweathered material. No doubt, ground sluicing required capital and investment in labor prior to the finding of gold, and maintaining an adequate supply of water was a constant challenge. Nonetheless, gold-vein operations were usually more risky and laborious. Moreover, in vein mining hand-crush was usually inefficient, requiring most of the times big stone mortars with pestle operated levers, or water/horse powered stamp mills (West 1952:65). The separation of gold from crushed ore was not as simple as panning with *bateas* in the rivers. Robert West argued that most gold lodes in Colombia contained indeed large amounts of sulfides, which caused the minerals to be highly refractory:

Colonial miners were baffled by the inability to wash or even amalgamate much gold from seemingly high-grade ore. Consequently, much material of high gold content was abandoned as tailings, which in the past fifty years have been reworked profitably by modern methods of cyanidation and flotation. (...) The presence of such ores probably retarded greatly colonial gold production in New Granada (West 1952:65-66).

Moreover, *filón* [vein gold] and *aluviación* [alluvial gold] were not the same for *Tomeños* [people from la Toma], as Roberto had suggested me in Mindala. It was not only a matter of different mining techniques; it was also, as *Tomeños* told me, a matter of different kinds of gold: "You see, we don't have rivers up here, but we can do both. They probably confused you with the idea that *aluviación* and alluvial are the same," said an elder while drawing in my notebook to illustrate the difference, "but the point is that the gold you find in *filón* and *aluviación* are different. One is found following a *veta* [vein], for example mineral de *jagua* [a mixture whose color can change depending on the rocks], which you need to crush in order to find the gold dust. The other is found following *cintas* [pay streaks]," he said finishing his drawing of veins, layers and strips. "The

problem is that, as you are going to see now *en este corte* [literally in this cut, but it referred to a fold or a strip in the mountain] we can only take out the material that we are going to grind later, because you cannot carry out more than that, whereas in the later you can wash as much as you want.” There were, indeed, reasons to make a difference. Among other things, there were different reputations associated to one or other technique, especially now that the heavy machinery and new equipment was changing dramatically all sorts of mining traditions (see Chapter 5).

In his teenage years Arley was too scared to go deep into the *socavones* [mine tunnels]. Instead of using *porras* and *muelas* [sledgehammer and chisel], he preferred to help outside the mines or even work for *jornales* [daily wages]. At that time he earned fifteen pesos carrying rocks from a *corte* [cut] with very difficult access. He had to move *material* from the mine entrance till the path where the mules were waiting to take it to the grinder. “On those days, there were more than two men working *en la clavada* [referring to the mine tunnel, but using a word that resembled the idea of diving], every time they went deeper they added a new miner, so they offered me the chance, but I wasn’t sure. That was only for tough miners. You have to keep in mind that sixty years ago, it was pure brute force. It wasn’t easy to work on those tunnels looking for veins. Sometimes, if you were in a good mine you could use *polvora* (powder), but there were no electric *martillos* or *búfalos* [air compressors that bring fresh oxygen to the tunnel].”

One day around the celebrations and adorations *del Niño* [baby Jesus] in December, he remembers being invited to a party and realized he needed an elegant outfit. On that precise moment he said to have found the courage to enter the *socavón*, and in a couple of days earned more than enough money necessary for dress and shoes.

“We excavated during the day and transported the mineral by night. I remember that in order to move the rocks, we had to build a big fire to heat them so that they could be break apart, using water and *picas*. After a few days, Cirilo, the mine owner, called me. I was expecting something like fifty pesos or so, but I came out with three hundred pesos in my pockets. Imagine my happiness. I had never seen that much money before. I waked and I counted the bills, I placed them in my pockets, and then I counted them again, I was so exited” he remarked holding both hands: “Imagine what we could have done if we had a proper *empresa* [enterprise] and technology,” he said reveling aspirations that came in conflict with discourses endorsed by social leaders who argued that mining in “ancestral territories” should only be done by using artisanal tools and locally available knowledge.

Later that day, as my host Arley and I passed between rows of houses and crossed the market, looking for a place where I could stay the night, Arley spotted a community council member, having lunch in a small food stand. As a colleague had introduced me to La Toma and many *tomeños* during the early moths of my first research stint on the northern Cauca, I tried to focus our conversation on mining technical aspects without striking *los temas calientes* [hot topics] of contemporary politics (see Chapters 4 and 5). After all, as I have learned from Bertha and Roberto, there were ways of knowing through the use of mining tools and techniques that shaped forms of belonging, memory and sense of place. I opted to tell him about Bertha’s expression (*venir de las rocas*), and waited for his reaction: “*Pues a ver* [Well look], It would be wrong to say that these mines belong to all of us,” he immediately answered. “I would be lying if I tell you that we all are a big family where *todo es de todos* [everything belongs to everyone]. Sometimes you have to make those claims, but these mines have owners, and not anyone

can come and work in them just because they belong to the community,” said the council member referring to the process that allowed their ancestors to save gold to pay for their freedom and later buy the lands, which they inhabit today. “Since the group of elders managed to buy these lands we have been able to form our own working system, with our own rules. We were able to decide how to use our time, we have since then always included time for tending crops, hunting and fishing,” complemented the social leader and council member.

“*Los antiguos* [ancients],” Arley interjected, “usually had one day of the week, I believe Saturday, to work for themselves in different activities; for instance mining gold and cultivating their own food, but they also found the way to hide gold while working.” This process described enthusiastically by Arley, was by no means an easy thing.²⁹ Freedom had a high price; it could cost around 150 and 300 pesos *de ocho reales* depending on the age, gender and qualities for work. This was a large sum of money for slaves, especially considering that *Capitanes* were frequently told not to allow miners to take advantage of the best mining sites. Besides, mine owners knew that imported and therefore overpriced items such as clothes, tobacco or *aguardiente* were regularly first in their slave’s priorities hindering any possibilities of savings. In other instances, the mine owner neglected to provide his crews with supplies, figuring that they could pay from their own gold, the meat, and cloth necessary for their subsistence (West 1952:100).

Asking people in their fifties and sixties about the norms of resource used and land ownership that prevailed in the mines of La Toma, I was told that the *cortes mineros* [mining sites] were most of the times identified with family-names, and for accessing them an individual had to activate his affiliation to a decent group. Each *corte* makes

room for new adults when they conform their families either by adding the new family to the mine already operated by the nuclear family, or by adjudicating them a new *frente* or *ramal* [mining front] within the main mine or *socavon* [mining tunnel].³⁰

As explained by the anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann for the region of Barbacoas along the Güelmambi River, in the Pacific costal region, slave crews conformed over time a kinship system, which after manumission, regulated access to mining and farming rights (Friedemann 1974). Defined by their local term as “*troncos*,” this social organization was based on cognatic groups, “which claim a particular founder to whom every individual traces his line of decent though male or female link” (Friedemann 1998:183). According to Friedemann, local oral history relate the origins of each “*tronco*” with freed slaves who took possession of the lands and formed families that have lived there ever since. Over time these “*troncos*” ended up corresponding with a particular territory and communal mines where family members live and work. In the anthropological literature, “*troncos*” correspond to non-unilineal descent groups, in which affiliation is based on choice rather than a fixed descent rule, as is common in lineages.

On the Güelmambi the basic domestic and economic unit is the nuclear family. A man ideally takes his wife to live in a house he builds when they begin their life together. If he as yet has no house, he may take her to his parents’ house until he obtains the wood to ‘raise’ their own. Since both the man and woman have their own rights to a residence site, *chagra* and mining sites, a decision is made on the affiliation of the new family unit. The husband and wife may come from the same settlement, but each is likely to have an affiliation with a different *tronco*. (...) cross-*tronco* marriages endow the new family unit with wider kinship links and, thus, its ability to call upon a larger set of people for reciprocal tasks (Friedmann 1998:192).

Hence, along the Güelmambi River as new adults activated one possible affiliation, they received rights to a house, plot, and mining operations in areas owned by a “*tronco*.” They continued, however, to retain latent rights in other “*trancos*.” Although in La Toma most mines are still worked by families, the question whether this kinship system from the rivers of the Pacific Ocean applied to the mines of the interior puzzled me. As one old widower miner told me before entering a mine tunnel: “What I can tell you, is that through mining we learn from young age about honesty and loyalty, and something else that newcomers usually don’t respect; solidarity. If my mine is poor today, but yours is rich, I can always ask you for help,” he said solemnly, but at the same time with certain complicity, as if he knew the kinds of words anthropologists like to hear. As well as I had come to know *tomeños*, I couldn’t be certain whether he was delivering a romantic portray of the community or, instead, just allowing himself a moment of pride. “So, how do you work your mine? Do you take your sons or relatives?” I asked. “Oh no,” he said right away, “My sons only come for Christmas and holidays. I work with God and the Virgin María. They help more than anyone else,” he replied laughing.

Trying to be useful in the mines, but failing most of the times, I learned in the following days that such system of reciprocity still operated among some miners and families. But, what was perhaps more evident was the role played by *cortes mineros* [mining sites] in the socialization of youngsters and the establishment of social bonds across the town. Yet, this importance for sociality did not restrict more commercially minded relationships, like the use of employees or the possibility of leasing the mines.



Figures 11 and 12. Above, the entrance of a mining tunnel in Mindala. In the picture below an old *molino de pisón* [Californian stamp mill] is shown. Here iron bars crush rocks imbibed in water in a rhythmic compass whose sound is both exciting and macabre. Tarps or sacks are used as filters for the particles. Photographs by the author.

“This is private property,” one miner said after I asked him if the mine was organized around family bonds: “Here we work by percentages. Since the mine owners buy the explosives and the tools they have more share, but I have my own *frente* [frontline], so I am not always being told what to do.” Each mine has regularly one single entrance, but inside the tunnel there could be different *frentes* [frontlines] that miners work individually. Moreover, he said, “Once the *material* is taken out, we have to pay for the grinder, which is run by others. You pay according to how many tumbrels and spins you need” (See Figure 11 and 12).

In subsequent conversations with other miners, I would hear more about these complex variances in the norms of resources access. Nevertheless, what was perhaps more important to miners was the pride in local knowledge and labor; their collective work and the knowledge required for working in tunnels, for channeling water from stacks and ditches, and the knowledge required in distinguishing and taking advantage of the found mineral ores. For all the gold that nortecaucanos had produced, I saw little or no gold being displayed as jewelry. People did talk about money, but the interests of miners in learning what water, rocks, and tools could do, rather than the simply desire to profit from gold, enabled them to discern a life in mining and thus, eventually, to collaborate with each other more productively with it.

Looking at geologic infiltrations, forced labor regimes, and mining practices, this section has argued that what is left of long lasting colonial regimes, are not just a histories of racialization, extraction and exploitation, but also the experience of people who have sought to belong to the region and have come to know themselves precisely through inhabiting and working these same landscapes of exploitation and extraction.

Final remarks

Following Bertha's "depth metaphor" and Roberto's advice to ask people about mining technics, I have tried to develop in this chapter a historiographical and ethnographic contextualization that brings other agents and dimensions into the choice of the northern Cauca region as the site of a major Spanish settlement, and as a sites of powerful attachments and feelings for its present day inhabitants. This chapter has brought together two different, yet interconnected aspects: coveting and holding gold as an economic resource, and mining it as a way of life. On the one hand, extracting gold as an economic resource invites a discussion about the place it occupies in the world economy (the dreams of wealth, its status as a supercurrency, and its links to the violent accumulation that allowed capitalism to emerge). In the province of Popayán, and especially in the Caloto mining district, the intersection of the two time scales (geologic and human), since the last quarter of the sixteenth century, not only encouraged the settlement of an area that would otherwise have probably been shunned by the Spanish, but also ended up transforming the whole Province into a "slave society" (Marzahl 1978, Colmenares 1979, Bryant 2006). On the other hand, mining gold brings to the fore how gold which was created as valuable by the work of nortecaucanos, has forged deep connections between people and landscapes, allowing communities and social movements to claim, as I will show in subsequent chapters, certain forms of belonging and livelihood. Emphasizing the irreplaceable role mining plays in everyday life Roberto said to me: "There is a tale, I don't know if it is true, that, after slavery, it took at least 12 years for our ancestors to save enough money to buy these lands. My father used to say that mining gave us freedom from slavery, I say now that it has given us autonomy, because you can be free

but still be poor and landless. That is why I teach these youngsters how to mine. Doing mining they learn to walk, to add, to subtract, to cooperate, to swim, ultimately they learn to live,” insisted Roberto looking for his son who was listening intently behind him.

Learning to mine gold has made people like Bertha, Roberto, Aurora, Faviola or Arley aware of whom they are. It has been part of their sense of place and has made them aware of their position in history, not just as individuals but also as part of a larger collectivity and against the background of a broader social and racial system.

All along the three centuries of colonial rule, mining conditions and technology remained more or less constant, and the production of precious metals maintained its predominance as the main source of foreign income. During the eighteenth century, gold exports reached above 80% of the total exported value (Melo 1989). But this landscape was about to change in the nineteenth century, when gold sales began to experience periods of decline. Slave revolts and emancipation through participation in the Wars for Independence, during the first two decades of the century, would trigger a process of stagnation of gold production (Zuluaga 1986, Sanders 2004, Hamnett 1990). Furthermore, the lack of capital (since the Church ceased offering credit) and the raid of *haciendas* by patriot armies and later by liberal popular political supporters, led some owners to accept slaves’ self-manumission as a way to recuperate their investment. Finally, the total emancipation of slaves in January 1851, along with the sending of slaves to fight in Perú transformed mining activities all along the coast, and in the mountains of the inter-Andean valleys. These changes, explored in detail in Chapter 2, were and indissoluble component of the experience and memories of *nortecaucanos*.

When slavery was finally abolished, land titles and mining concessions remained mostly in the hands of whitened elites and landowners, who managed to retain their privileges awarding a few hectares to settlers in exchange for work (See chapter 2). Nonetheless, in the political and economic turmoil of those post-independence years, mines and *hacienda* owners in the Caloto district also found more profitable to rent out their operations, than trying to keep the *entables* [mining sites and infrastructure] running as usual. Others simply sought to commercialize the gold coming out of these sites, finding a break in the demanding job of maintaining farms and finding new deposits. The former slave population also deployed their own strategies. Some escaped and freedmen, hiding in the mountains and forests, chose to direct their work to agriculture and subsistence fishing, turning the gold sands to occasional occupation, and generally refusing to submit to the wage system. Others sought unclaimed placers or sought to occupy lands whose owners have been absent. Finally, as I will explore in the next chapter, a good number of those descendant populations remained attached to *haciendas* as *terrajeros*, gaining only very gradually the capacity to purchase lands and mining titles from impulsive heirs willing to make immediate gains by dividing their properties and selling them to many individuals.³¹

When I asked Roberto to tell me what he knew of this period, he said: “Well since it was impossible for our ancestors to go back to Africa, *nos fuimos regando* [we all went spreading] around here,” Roberto explained using an eloquent liquid gesture with his hands. “I guess *hacendados* kept control of the mines, but they had now *una mano de negros regados por ahí* [a bunch of blacks spread all over]. Imagine how that must have been,” said Roberto smiling broadly.

Chapter 2. A slave ship stranded on sugarcane

Renewing contacts from my pre-dissertation fieldwork, I visited Severo, a local schoolteacher in the plains conformed by the confluence between the Palo and La Paila Rivers, both tributaries of the Cauca in its eastern margin. A soft-spoken man, he was especially fan of the history of *haciendas*. Since the *Catedra de Estudios Afros* had been implemented in local educational institutions, in the early 2000s, many schoolteachers like him renewed their interest in doing research on local history.¹ “Sometimes, you wonder how did this tree grow out here?” Severo said as we walked slowly down a burning dirt road in the middle of sugar cane plantations. “Families are like seeds, they travel with the wind; birds or water can carry them. My grandparents came from Gelima, near the Ovejas River, up there, where the Salvajina dam was built,” he said.

As Severo tells me about his ancestors, he stops and points to the mountains, then he turns around and points to the vast cane fields looking for a site that is no longer visible on the landscape. With his long and skinny arms, he draws an imaginary line between the two places: “There were mining camps up there, which later became towns, and at some point on this dirt road there was an *hacienda*; *la hacienda Quintero*. Actually, there were a bunch of other *haciendas* in this flat zone of northern Cauca,” he said, while covering his head from the sun with a blue notebook that he was always carrying around. “La Bolsa, for instance, is very close from here; it is right there at the

entrance of Villarica. Less than 10 kilometers to the south, you will find Japio, which was also related to Quintero. Together these *haciendas* made like a large triangle,” he argued, almost as if giving a lecture to his students. We were half kilometer from Severo’s farm across the Palo River, but as the days of canoeing and *balsadas* [bamboo rafts] were left behind, we had to ride along the river to find the bridge. It took us almost half hour to cross to the other side.

“The farmhouses were made out of adobe and *guadua* (bamboo). Well, long before, all houses were made out of mud and *bareque*,” he continued, “but the *haciendas* were immense. They had their own chapel, made out of brick and tile. Some slaves were kept there working in *trapiches* [rudimentary sugar mill], but others were sent to the mines. They were always moving people from here to there, and back. I believe that was the case of my ancestors,” he concluded greeting a couple of *vecinos* [neighbors] that crossed silently in front of us.

While watching them pass, envying the umbrella that the woman was using, I asked Severo if the *hacienda* was somewhere to be seen: “No, nothing is left,” he replied, “el *Ingenio* la Cabaña [an industrial sugarcane mill] bought these lands in 1994 and threw the house down. We asked them to keep the *hacienda* as a site of memory, but we were alone in that fight,” he replied exhibiting a similar nostalgia as the one I found in the mines up stream (See Figures 13).

Although the names of *haciendas* and paths of circulation varied in other resident’s accounts, most of the people I interviewed in the plains around the Palo and La Paila rivers, shared these memories of mobility and linkages between *haciendas* and mines. Some research participants especially recalled the *hacienda* Japio; one of the main



Figures 13 and 14. Above, the road where the *hacienda* Quintero was located. Below, the entrance to *hacienda* La Bolsa near the town of Villarica. Both estates were in the nineteenth century subdivisions of the *hacienda* Japio. Before the sugarcane industry began advancing in the first half of the twentieth century, the lands of Quintero were thickly wooded and it was there where tenants and squatters had made their homes. Photographs by the author.

slave estates in northern Cauca located between Santander de Quilichao and Caloto. Others, talked about mines even further in the Pacific coast, as Barbacoas or Timbiquí. Still others, went to recall the last names that linked them to regions in Africa where enslaved people were captured. In all of these memories, as I will explore in this chapter, there was a profound sense of spatial mobility, and a sense of interconnection that went beyond their own experiences of time and space.

Curiously, there was no evidence of a sort of “collective forgetting” of the experience of slavery, found in other parts of the country around the early nineties, when activists, missionaries, and government officials were busy conducting meetings and workshops around the “rights of black communities” based on ethnic and cultural claims.² Of course, my ethnographic encounters were happening more than twenty years after the “multicultural turn,” so one could expect that the work was already done. I knew, moreover, that these oral histories were not raw materials at all, if such a thing ever existed. In any case, these memories seemed to have different origins than the “pedagogy of alterity” carried out by activist and other actors in the 1990s. Instead of an ethnic and multicultural discourse associated with the processes generated around the Transitory Article 55 and Law 70 of the reformed constitution (1991), these memories seemed to be anchored in other political struggles and organizational referents.

This chapter offers insights into particular and critical moments in the development of these memories; namely those related to the mine-hacienda complex, and to the rise of the free peasantry. Here, the writings of Germán Colmenares and Michael Taussig (among others) are highlighted, not only because they place Popayán’s slave society and black people at the center of the history of the colony and the region’s

socioeconomic and land tenure development, but also because in so doing their historical and anthropological discourses on *Norte del Cauca* have also lay the foundations for specific ideas about blackness, territory, and production (Almario 2010:67). For example, as Fernando Coronil put it bluntly when reviewing Taussig's work, those "exalting their difference, erasing their historical links, and homogenizing their internal features" (Coronil 1996:68). Within their multifaceted narratives and concepts, important themes emerge that allow one to track critically the uses of a varied, rarely coherent, often ambiguous, but always persistent images of black people, as they weave its way through economic practices, political struggles, and organizational referents. As I move into the final chapters of this dissertation, the ideas and tropes that I discuss here, even as they seek to unsettle colonial representations, will find their place in the production of the region as a *territorio ancestral* [ancestral territory]. When consolidated as themes mobilized by activists and leaders, these ideas not only help to explain contemporary discourses of resistance, ethnicity, and development (explored in chapter 4 and 5), but also contribute to shape the way people have come to understand themselves.

After all, as Michael Taussig has recognized in an all too familiar fashion to contemporary ethnographers: "anthropology studies culture, but in the process "makes" culture as well" (Taussig 2010:xi). One can read this phrase, which appeared in the preface of the thirtieth anniversary edition of *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in Latin America* (2010), as an attempt to bring the publication up to date with the debates that challenged the discipline in the decades after its publication. Nevertheless, in the specific context of *Norte del Cauca*, this assertion can also be read as a form of accounting for the role that Taussig's writings played in bringing an essentialized

narrative of resistance into being—a topic I return to later in this chapter. In this sense, the ethnography of *Norte del Cauca* is also the ethnography of the historiographical and anthropological knowledge with which the state and the academia has thought and intervened the region.

In the first part of this chapter, preliminary remarks on the mine-hacienda complex, as described by Colmenares and other available source material, will lay the basis for discussing how articulations between mines and *haciendas*, during the second gold cycle (1680-1820), shaped social and political processes in the region, before and after independence. In the second part, I deal with *nortecaucanos* political engagement in the independence wars and their later case of post-emancipation, one in which freedom did not mean a complete rupture with the *haciendas* or the emergent export system. On the contrary, it meant the development of moral economies and a political conscience, aligned with the nascent Liberal Party, around the principles of equality and defense of their possessions and rights to trade. Thus the chapter shows, that these active bargaining, shaped not only the meanings of liberalism (Sanders 2004:287), but also demand us to acknowledge the long neglected interconnections of their subsistence economies with larger markets, as well as their transactions and the commitments with large owners, legal agents, and politicians.

From encomiendas to haciendas

The conversation with Severo occurred several months after I encountered Bertha up in the mountains. However, while watching Severo pointing to the cordillera, it was easy for me to imagine Bertha, and the other miners I encountered in Mindala and La Toma, bent

down grinding rocks or digging deep into the earth. From Bertha's perspective, her subsistence mining had little to do with the colonial connection between *haciendas* and mines. After all, mine abandonment must have been more pervasive in places distant from towns in the plains where landowners settled. On the contrary, in the lower parts of the valley the landscape was full of landmarks associated with colonial times (e.g. open fields of cane, haciendas, Doctrinal Chapels, and bridges erected by enslaved labor). These landscapes were the spatial product of *nortecaucanos*' involvement with forced labor regimes and economies of extraction, and stood as reminders of their insertion in a particular regime of historicity (Trouillot 2002:853).

Knowing that we were very close to the well-preserved *hacienda* of La Bolsa and trying to avoid the hard sun among the cane, I asked Severo if we could pay a short visit to the estate (See Figure 14). "Why not," said Severo hopping into the car, "if only they had left the trees at least we could have sat here and chat perfectly." The landscape did not change much in our five to ten-minute ride to La Bolsa. We kept seeing the same sugar cane farms, only interrupted by burned spots ready for the next planting season. Scattered houses enclosed by the "green monster" [as people called here the sugarcane industrial farms] appeared from time to time on the way. We were living behind the banks of the Palo River watercourse towards the town of Villarica, closer to the Cauca River. Since the expansion of *haciendas* around the end of the eighteenth century, these plains began to be sparsely populated by slave farmers, which after manumission in 1852 found the ways to retain the land and even advance the agricultural frontier towards the interior of the valley.

“This is it,” said Severo making me stop abruptly in the middle of the road. I was intrigued; we parked near the fence of a big metalized industrial park and free trade zone (See chapter 6). “So,” I asked, bluntly, “Don’t tell me that the *hacienda* is located in front of its modern equivalent?” Severo hesitated a moment. He then said, cautiously, “I haven’t thought about that, but yes these factories could be today’s *haciendas*,” he said, now laughing.

“I just hope that they don’t have the same blood stains as the ones that I am about to show you.” Severo was referring to a wall in the back of the hacienda La Bolsa where, according to local tales, slaves were harshly punished and beaten with lashes. “The rings to which slaves were attached had been removed,” he warned me, “but the blood marks kept appearing for many years, no matter how many paint layers they added.”

As we walked into the *hacienda*, I remembered having read a similar account in Taussig’s famous Devil book:

Blacks commonly say that the interior walls of the haciendas are permanently blotched by the blood of whipped and tortured slaves, which no amount of painting can conceal. At midnight on Good Friday people claim they hear the clatter of a mule carrying Julio Arboleda [slave owner and landlord of Japio], vainly seeking repentance for his sins (Taussig 2010[1980]:48).

The exceptionally loud courtship calls of hundreds of *chicharras* [cicadas] in the centennial *samanes* [wide-canopied tree] surrounding us, made these images I had, even more intense. The old farmhouse, on the other hand, stood silently as an aground vessel; a slave ship stranded on sugarcane. Access, though, was restricted. Severo explained me that it was lacking repairs, and it was not secure to go inside: “Since it is now patrimony of the municipality, it is not as simply as fixing this or that, it demands a careful

restoration process.” Instead, we took a look around the rubbles of a colonial chapel where, according to Severo, slaves used to be baptized.

When I expressed surprise that the *hacienda* was smaller than I anticipated, Severo reacted immediately: “*Ay* my friend don’t get confused, this was one of the main slave estates on the valley, it might look not as grandiose as Japio, I know, but you must remember that they all worked together. At some point both haciendas, and even Quintero, were own by the same Arboleda family from Popayán.” Right after saying that, Severo observed passionately that the vast lands, which later constituted these *haciendas* in the plains of Caloto and whose connections will reach till the mines of Gelima in the western mountains, started as *encomiendas* [right to collect tribute from the produce of the land, and to exact labor service from the resident population] granted to the conquistadores of the province.

This history that so fascinated Severo, suggested not only that slave *haciendas* shaped social life in profound ways, but also that the uneven distribution of the land on the Cauca Valley had barley changed in centuries. While colonial *encomiendas* did not imply any rights to lands, the granting of such titles did in fact facilitate the acquisition by *encomenderos* of *estancias* [large rural complexes used for agriculture and raising livestock] close to the *pueblos de indios* [special towns designed to incorporate the native populations into the Spanish colonial system]. By the time, most Indian groups in the district were retrenched in the upper parts of the mountainous Paéz territory in the central cordillera. However, it is likely that early small urban nucleus and mining camps in the plain areas, would have initially been supplied, both with food crops and labor force, on the basis of Indian forced settlements. The anthropologist Joanne Rappaport, describes

how lacking a substantial local labor pool, much of the labor brought to raise wheat and corn in the *haciendas de campo* of Caloto came from surrounding Paéz groups, which were forced to relocate in these western slopes (Rappaport 1998[1990]:40-41).

In these *estancias*, *encomienda* Indians could have been employed in mining and trading duties, and others could have been provided with tools and animals to clear the land and cultivate maize and beans. Yet, after exhausting the scarce Indian labor force, most *estancias* in this area were granted just to constitute herds of cattle and mares (Sendoya 1975: 23). Indeed, since early date the few *encomenderos* in the vicinity began to be more concerned with appropriating runaway cattle, than developing extensive agricultural *haciendas* (Colmenares 1997:178-181).³ The low labor requirements gave ranching an advantage during the continuous labor shortages in the Valley. Besides, the export of cattle became an important factor in the economy of the province. The savanna grasslands of Caloto and the Cauca Valley provided cattle, not only for the capital Popayán that frequently experienced shortages during the eighteenth century (e.g. ACC Cabildo T14, folios 42v, 52, 63-68), but also exported cattle to Quito as part of the regional trade between the two colonial centers (Marzahl 1978:8,12, 80-81).

Despite Crown's provisions, a slow process appears to have transformed these *estancias* into more permanent rights to land, leading finally to formal titles. *Visitadores* [colonial officers reporting to the King] usually complained that *encomenderos* preferred to live on these *estancias* instead of living in the towns specially designed for Spaniards, such as Popayán or Cali. Since the late sixteenth century, Crown provisions for *composiciones de tierras* [the payment of fees for lands that despite *de facto* occupations continued to be legally part of the crown domain], assisted gradually the legalization of

these occupations and the later emergence of *hacienda* tenure rights. After all, by 1637 most titles exhibited by *encomenderos* in the province were given by *governors* or *cabildos*, which in theory didn't have the royal faculty to grant them (Colmenares 1983:29). By the sixteenth century most of the lands on the wider right bank of the Cauca River were already distributed in *mercedes* [land grants] given by the local *cabildo* to conquistadores and its descendants (Colmenares 1986:140).

Non-*encomendero* landowners, on the other hand, were always looking for the opportunity to own one or more *encomiendas* to use them as a source of labor in their mines and *estancias* (Valencia 1987:15). Often this proved more than difficult, forcing emergent merchants and newly enriched miners from very early times to import slaves or enforced debt peonage. In this context, if landowners intended to preserve their heritage, they faced with the decision to compete or join forces with the emergent classes. In short, after competing for indigenous work force during the first gold cycle 1520-1620, landowners in the valley ended up prospering more from the economic opportunities offered by the scattered mining sites in the Caloto district and the Pacific lowlands, than from tributes or agricultural surpluses produced by the small handful of natives (Colmenares 1983:30).

As I will detail in the next section, the effective consolidation of *haciendas* as productive units took place through marital alliances and a successive purchase of rights by miners and merchants (Colmenares 1983:57-78). This was in fact the case of the *haciendas* of La Bolsa and Quintero, as Severo had told me. After being owned as separate *estancias* by conquistadores, both *haciendas* were finally sold in the second half of the seventieth century to members of the Arboleda family, whose fortune had been

acquired in mining camps along the Chocó province and had strengthen links with the rising merchant class in the province (Taussig 2008 [1977]:402). The *hacienda* Japio, ran years later with the same fate. After being owned by the Jesuits for more than a century, in 1775 Francisco Antonio Arboleda bought the estate for seventy thousand pesos (Llanos 1979). This process of disentailment, whereby land became a transferable good rather than property attached permanently to a titled family, happened towards the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, during this period, in its search for a source of prestige and influence, mining capital not only reshaped old landownerships (acquired through conquest and primitive accumulation), but also positioned haciendas within a new complex of interconnection with merchants and miners advancing a brand new model of capital accumulation, agrarian change, and spatial relations.

The Hacienda-Mine complex

The particular case of *haciendas* in the Caloto area and their relationship with the mines of the district, could serve to evaluate the widely influential definition that Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf devised for “Haciendas and Plantations in Middle America and the Antilles” (1957). In their well-known paper, the authors defined *hacienda* as “an agricultural estate, operated by a dominant land-owner and a dependent labour force, organized to supply a small-scale market by means of scarce capital” (Mintz and Wolf 1957:380). Plantations, on the other hand, stood for “an agricultural estate, operated by dominant owners (usually organized into a corporation) and a dependent labour force, organized to supply a large-scale market by means of abundant capital” (Mintz and Wolf 1957:380). In both types there was a high degree of control exercised over the labor force

and the factors of production were employed for capital accumulation. These social systems, Mintz and Wolf argued, were not necessary sequential stages in the processes of agricultural development, yet they represented responses to different conditions in the supply of capital and the kinds of markets and societies with which they were connected. Consequently the authors found, for instance, that under *haciendas* factors of production seemed to be burdened with demands which were economically irrelevant to the process of production serving at times the status aspirations of the owners (Mintz and Wolf 1957:387). These cultural implications, distinguished their approach from other views that dismissed the larger societal and the historical conditions involved specifically in the establishment of these two types, haciendas and plantations, to the exclusion of others (Mintz and Wolf 1957:382).

Translated to Spanish only in 1975, Mintz' and Wolf's article set the standard on the subject for long time, but it was clear that their pretended status of cross-culturally valid types for comparison, hardly accounted for all existing and past cases. In fact, fifteen years after its publication scholars engaged in the study of large states in Latin America (e.g. *latifundios*, *estancias*, *haciendas*, and *plantaciones*) agreed on the existence of a continuum between the two extremes, where components of one or the other system could easily be absent or shared (Mörner 1973:185-186). Moreover, thanks to the increase of research on particular cases across Latin America the institution's multiple dimensions, their differential links to markets, and the non-rural activities of the landowners could not be left out. For example, the new evidence allowed to question one of the constituent elements of the model; that of the necessary connection between *haciendas* and *peonaje* or labor indebtedness (Mörner 1973:201), or the idea that the

plantation laborer was typically a “free laborer” in a “free labor market” (Giusti-Cordero 1994). Others found useless the whole distinction between *haciendas* and plantations, especially if one examines the period before the large-scale investments were made in Latin America (Kay 1974).

In spite of these revisions, the Colombian historian Germán Colmenares (1990, 1992) had a hard time trying to interpret the historical data of colonial *haciendas* in the Province of Popayán against the classical definition. He suggested that for Mintz and Wolf, based more on the Mexican, Brazilian and Antillean cases, the New Granada *haciendas* must have appeared as an anomaly, not precisely for its mixed features, but mainly for the subsidiary character of these units of agricultural production (Colmenares 1990:10). To be more precise, in the province of Popayán, *haciendas* increased their profitability and incorporated enslaved populations not exactly by merit of their agricultural development, but by merit of mining production.⁴ Here, the existence of large crews in mining centers served of stimulus for the creation and expansion of *haciendas* whose owners were also miners and traders.⁵

Notwithstanding some contrasting features and historical trajectories, *haciendas* and other major agricultural establishments in the *Governación*, shared a dependent interconnection with mining districts. For example, the landowners in the southern end of the Province (e.g. Pasto) controlled and benefited from the mines of Barbacoas in the Pacific Coast. Those associated to the town of Popayán had under tighter grip the mines of Chisquío, approximately fifteen miles west of the city, and the greater and lasting source of gold found in the Caloto district. On the other hand, the mining frontier of Chocó propelled haciendas in the Cauca Valley (e.g. Cali and Buga), were landowners

had already direct contact with a series of placers along the road to the Coast near Buenaventura (Calima, Dagua, Anchicayá and Raposo drainages). In short, for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth century mines provided *haciendas* not only with a market for certain products (*aguardiente* [Raw liquor distilled from sugar cane], tobacco, meat), but also with a surplus labor that otherwise would be prohibitive for landowners (Colmenares 1992:10-18, 1986:141). These interactions were termed by Colmenares as the “Mina-Hacienda complex.” Product of a particular integration expressed in the circulation of products and in an economic complementarity —forced by an early form of mercantilism centered on the accumulation of precious metals—, this complex had regional links that extended till Quito with its artisan manufacturing sector and Cartagena as a mayor slave port (Colmenares 1992:11-12).⁶

The peculiarity of the *haciendas* in *Norte del Cauca* (e.g. Japio), unlike those of the rest of the province (with the exception of Chisquío), is that these *haciendas* had gold deposits and mines within its immediate area (e.g. Gelima, Honduras and Quinamayo among others), and shared perhaps only with those in the Cauca Valley and its piedmonts the scarcity and dispersion of native labor. These conditions, combined with the expenses of slaves, demanded different sorts of specializations and settlements.

According to the report prepared by the governor of the province, Diego Antonio Nieto, by the year 1797 the Caloto Jurisdiction had the following demographic composition: 411 whites (2,3%), 5.315 indian (31,4%), 6.144 slaves (36,3%) y 5.067 free (30%) [among whom were *libertos*, manumitted, *mestizos* and *mulatos*] (Herrera 2009: 89). The same report showed that the Caloto district had the highest number of *real de minas* [permanent and organized mining settlements], *sitios* [grants of grazing rights] and

haciendas within the whole province: 8 *Real de Minas* (from a total of 20); 26 *sitios* (from a total of 58); and 23 *haciendas* (from a total of 34) (Herrera 2009:166-180). The high number of *sitios* and *haciendas*, placed the district already at the forefront in the amount of settlements by jurisdictions in the province and indexed the growth of activities linked to agriculture, livestock, and trade by the end of the eighteenth century. Particularly, the *curato* [parish seat] of Gelima was reported having seven mines, three *haciendas de labor de campo*, and the site of La Balsa. The site and *curato* of Quilichao also stood out in the report, registering seven *real de minas*, the sites of Quinamayo, Alegria, El Palo, La Dominga, and the *haciendas* of Japio, Matarredonda, Pilamo and La Bolsa. All of these burgeoning sites were made possible in great part by the economic and social articulations fostered by the various and disperse mining activities reaching even the newly opened mining frontier in the Pacific Lowlands.

Sitios [sites], as a colonial-tenure institution, were grants of grazing rights made by town councils that allocated sections of communal lands mainly for cattle. Sometimes, these grants of grazing rights were referred to as *estancias*, but as mentioned above, it's granting did not confer ownership of the land, only the right to build some shacks and corrals. Less frequently, herd owners managed to request the judge in charge of granting *composiciones*, to have their lands measured and delineated as *hatos* [cattle ranches]. Although there are no exact measures for defining *hatos*, in places like colonial Cuba these lands dedicated to the raising of livestock had approximately a radius of two leagues, or 1,684 caballerias, 8.5 kilometers approximately (Verdejo, Funo and Yamada 2008). *Curatos* was a term used by the colonial state to refer to villages and settlements, other than cities or towns, occupied mainly by non-indigenous people, but which, unlike

parishes, may or may not have a church or priest. Finally, the label of *hacienda* was reserved for major agricultural establishments, although almost always having some cattle. In these cases, the exploitation of the land was based on the mixed production of molasses and livestock. In the province of Popayán at least three types of haciendas were identified by historians: *Hato ganadero* [Cattle ranch], *Hacienda de trapiche* [mill farm], and *Hacienda de labranza* or *de campo* [farms] (Colmenares 1990:18). This conventional division and strict typology, should not obscure the fact the emphasis on one activity or the variations from one to another type, were conditioned by different factors, such as capital investment, access to the markets, or specializations of production within the properties of a single owner.

Colmenares has argued that half of the production of *haciendas* during the early eighteenth century was used in trade markets; the rest was distributed directly in the form of rations and aid (Colmenares 1992:38). This partial integration of the *haciendas* into the market system, hypothesized Colmenares, made the *hacienda*, at least in its moment of consolidation, closer to a feudal regime than to capitalistic features. But the Colombian historian didn't understand these feudal dimensions as a direct imposition enforced by conquistadors since the sixteenth century.⁷ On the contrary, he claimed that eighteenth century *haciendas* were perhaps closer to a feudal system than the productive practices of sixteenth century when *encomiendas* and indigenous production systems were in place (Colmenares 1990:39). Cautions should be made in any case when dealing with Jesuits haciendas, which according to Colmenares were more concerned with efficiency than any other landowners.

In fact, Jesuit enterprises were a case in point. After taking possession of previous mining operations and owing more than twenty African captives in Gelima and Honduras around 1640s, Jesuits established in the lower lands near Caloto and Cali veritable *haciendas*; Japio and Llanogrande respectively (Marzahl 1978:20). These states were developed mainly to economically support their school in Popayán, and their missionary practices in nearby settlements and mining camps. By 1733 a visiting father described this articulation in the following terms: “every hacienda is like the mother of the other and so [Llanogrande] will give to Japio each year one hundred cow calves and one hundred bull calves that will not exceed two years old” (Colmenares 1984:51). Japio, in turn, had to act “like mother” too, supplying the *cuadrilla* of slaves in the mines of Gelima and Honduras. Zamira Díaz de Zuluaga, a Colombian historian interested in the social aspects of these productive units, found that enslaved crews working under this complementarity between mines and *haciendas*, received weekly food ratios, consisting of one *almud* [colonial unit of measurement of volume and mass] of corn, thirty-two pairs of plantains, a few pounds of salted meat, and once a month half a pound of salt (Díaz de Zuluaga 1986:49). Children and those not able to work, received however half these supplies.

Soon landowners, as the Arboleda family, followed the model, integrating their mines in the Santa María mining settlement, close to Quilichao, with their *haciendas* of La Bolsa, and Novirao (Colmenares 1986:161). A description from colonel J.P Hamilton shows how, even on the eve of *Libertad de vientres* [Freedom of wombs, 1921], the mines of the Quinamayo River were still active and connected to the Japio *hacienda*, acquired by the Arboleda family after the Jesuits were expelled:

All these negroes worked at gold washing four days in the week for *Señor* Arboleda, and two days for themselves in the mines. Each married man had a cottage and a small piece of ground for cultivation, for which he paid no rent. From what I witnessed, I believe these slaves are most happy and comfortable under their present master, and enjoy more of the comforts of life than the laborers of some countries in Europe. [...] The negroes are certainly much exposed to the sun, but this exposure to great heat does not prove injurious to Africans, although it would be fatal to European constitutions. [...] After breakfast, Mr. Arboleda proposed that we should ride to one of his hills to see the operation of washing for gold dust, which was a league from Capió [Japio]. On our arrival, we found about a dozen negresses very neatly dressed in white petticoats with blue ornaments and large straw hats, busily employed, by the side of a small stream, washing the earth in *bateas* (or wooden bowls), for the gold dust, while the negroes were occupied in bringing the red clay to the side of the water (Hamilton 1827:121-125).

But, when things went wrong, as they usually did in the risky business of mining, the mining settlements were temporarily closed and the enslaved crews were fully relocated. This happened between 1680s and 1700s when the Jesuits apparently abandoned mining altogether, sending slaves back to Japio and Llanogrande to concentrate on ranching and sugar production (Marzahl 1978:27). Since mid-eighteenth century mine owners in the Chocó province did the same when gold production began to decrease in the rain forest, sending their crews back to Caloto. But *haciendas* also had their part in mobility. In 1705, the *hacienda* administrator of Llano Grande solicited the sale of four slaves that were inciting others to rebel against their masters. According to the record, they had previously fled, had been apprehended, but the administrator was worried that “they would commit atrocities similar to those committed by slaves on other *haciendas*, or all of them will flee, to the obvious detriment of the *hacienda*” (Venta de esclavos, Popayán, 20 junio 1705, APQ, VII, in Cushner 1982:138).

Little is known about how this forced mobility was assumed by slaves, especially in the case of particular sales. Kinship relationships developed within the mining crews must have certainly suffered by this forced displacement, yet in some cases it might have also contribute to extend its networks and strengthen the bonds with *hacienda* laborers. In fact, in a more contemporary period, the memory of these interconnections led Severo to enthusiastically exclaim: “in this region we are all relatives.”

With the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, a throughout inventory was solicited by the Governor of the province (ACC Sig, 5405 Col. C II -17 it). From this inventory it is possible to appreciate not only the interdependence between mines of Gelima and Honduras and the *haciendas* of Japio and Llanogrande in terms of supplies, but also the constant forced movement of slaves in the region. As the properties were about to pass into the hands of landowners and miners of Popayán and Caloto, some of these slaves were reported in the archival documents as being sent back, either to the mines, or the *haciendas*. It is not clear from the records whether this was done in order to sell the estates with all its “original” crews, or if it had to do with demands and requirements of labor force. What we can know is that the governors and procurator general of the city of Caloto was informed that due to the extensive number of slaves in Japio, something had to be done —106 are listed alive, 7 are reported dead (ACC Sig, 5405 Col. C II -17 it, folio 14-16, 30-32). The crown officers argued in a letter, that not all could be used in the hacienda, and that a considerable amount of clothing and food was spent annually supporting them: “It seems to the Ombudsman that it is convenient to sell half of the *negroes*, but not the *chusma*” (ACC Sig, 5405 Col. C II -17 it, folio 49v). In various Latin American countries the name *chusma* is still in present-day a derogatory name to refer to

lower class people, and it probably comes from the fact that it was given to slaves who were not directly engaged in productive activities, either by age or disable. What it is special of the Ombudsman's proposal was his suggestion that the sale be made trying to keep families together and not by selling them on demand one by one. The arrangement was in line with "reproductive" and "pacifying" pretentions commonly advise at the time to slave owners, but it certainly confirmed also that families were not simply traveling with the wind, birds or water as Severo told me on our way to the *hacienda*.

Regarding the configuration of *haciendas*, the inventory also allows to reconstruct a rough picture. Besides the chapel and main house, there were separated shacks for slaves and resident laborers. In addition, these haciendas had well organized plantations, yokes of oxen, cattle, horses, mills for grinding cane, and bronze pans mounted in furnaces for thickening the syrup and extracting *aguardiente*. Enslaves were dedicated to a system of year-round planting, harvesting and later grinding sugar cane. Yet, the value of livestock far surpassed agricultural production. Plantations in the *hacienda* were not as extensive as what observers were used to in the Caribbean or other places. From the seven Spanish leagues in circumference (approx. 21 miles) that the hacienda had, back in 1774, only approximately 22 hectares were planted with sugarcane.

As it was common in mining areas, *hacienda* slaves had also their own provisioning grounds, which in these flat lands occurred mostly in the challenging spaces between the Cauca river flood zones and areas suitable for livestock and crops. Such individual plots were undoubtedly indirect forms of subsidy to landlord's economic aspirations, which in addition contributed to the reproduction of labor force using lands that were not suited for cattle or extensive crops (Mintz 1978). Yet marshes and

floodable forests had also advantages for laborers and runaways,⁸ as Severo explained to me after our visit to the *haciendas* of Quintero and La Bolsa.

Back in his house in a *vereda* [hamlet] of Guachené, at the periphery of what once was the heavily forested northern limit of Japio *hacienda*, Severo insisted on showing me the plantains and fruit trees his mother had along the flood zones of the Palo River.

Severo's mother, as many other descendants of ex-slaves and poor settlers, had worked these lands since *haciendas* transitioned to the system of *terraje* [the payment of lands in kind or in exchange for work] to secure the labor potential after abolition in 1852. Today, alternating with intermittent involvements in domestic services in towns nearby, Severo's mother sold plantains from her small plot to balance her income. That is how Severo got to study in what his mother considered a better school in Puerto Tejada, a growing urban center conformed by those who were not so lucky to keep the land. His brother Jairo, on the other hand, didn't like studying as much as Severo. Since the age of fifteen he got involved with the extraction of sand and gravels from the river and quitted school.

After crossing a small concentration of houses organized around a small area of open land, we approached the riverbank under the shade of trees, stepping over a cushion of dry leaves and rotten fruits that covered a clay-silt mottled soil. "The watercourse usually comes through this area and waters the plants," said Severo approaching the River, "but this river has run through so many parts that we can no longer say where it is going next. For example, my grandmother's house was there in that high ground over *zancos* [pile dwelling] as protection against snakes and the floods, but the river also reached there more than once. That ground is like seven meters higher than the water level, but that did not stop the river," Severo speculated while kneeling to measure the

terrain with his gaze. Large parts of these lands, he would tell me later, were subjected to periodic floods caused by the overflowing of the rivers. The Palo River was now only one meter deep or so, but previously he recalled it being much deeper and more difficult to cross.

Stepping close to the shore to show me a collapsed section of the river cliff Severo added: “A couple of years ago we lost this part to the river, but then we gained shore down the bend. Now the boys are working there extracting sand.” One horse anchored in the riverbed was being loaded with sand deposits, as Severo’s brother provably did in his teenage years (See group of figure 15). On the beach an old truck waited half full, dripping water through the edges of its red metal dump body. On the other bank of the river, where water velocity and erosion were greatest, sugarcane fields—owned by the same mill that bought the hacienda Quintero and demolished the old house—stood firmly like a green retaining wall. Severo explained that before the 1930s those fields used to be planted with cacao and tobacco, which like today’s sand deposits were traded in towns nearby using the river.

“Look we were just there this morning, among those fields on the other side. As the *guaduales* [bamboo forest] were cut down to sow cane, the river began running faster. The *ingenio* [industrial sugarcane mill] changed also the course of the river, allowing the cane to gain more land and directing all the current against our farms,” Severo argued annoyed, “I have never been enemy of the capital. What I disagree with is the ways in which it has been used,” he said.



Figure 15. Riverbanks of the Palo River, Guachené. Photographs by the author.

The *cronista* Cieza de León had complained since early colonial times, that this very fertile *vegas* and extensive flatlands were only used by “deer and other wild animals, because there were not enough Christians to occupy such large spaces” (Cieza de León, in Crist 1952:13). But this situation was not only a matter of insufficient labor force, markets or a lack of Christians; as we will see with the next section it was also a matter of lack of knowledge. As travelers speculated about the lack of use of cash crops in the fertile lands irrigated by the Cauca River, enslaved farmers, and freeman had for long showed that they knew more about cultivating and making a living in tropical and floodable areas than their “masters” did.

Traditional farms and the rise of the free peasantry

Beside conversations and landscape walks as the ones conducted with Severo, participatory mapping sessions offered me also insights about *nortecaucanos*’ livelihoods and sense of place before the expansion of sugarcane industry in the middle of the twentieth century (See Maps 9 and 10). According to the stories people narrated while drawing, in the floodplains conformed by the confluence between the Palo and La Paila Rivers, both tributaries of the Cauca in its eastern margin, residents depended for subsistence on a agroforestral system, combined with small-scale fishing, hunting, and temporary or permanent employment on cattle ranches, sugarcane mills, and rice and beans producing estates. People also supplemented their income with periodic interactions in the region’s markets trading coffee, tobacco, cacao, plantains, *aguardiente* or *guadua*. During rainy seasons (from April to June and October to December), people took advantage of the flood areas that fertilized the land and provided fishing

Sitting amidst spread cacao beans, being dried by the sun, I managed one afternoon to gather Severo and three other elders from the Palo River to discuss these maps. The men knew each other, but not all were close friends. As they shared with me and a couple of kids their memories of past times, they too realized that they had historically more in common than they knew.

“Here in *La cachimbada*, there were lots of *cachimbo* trees around, now only few are left,” Severo noted attempting to open the discussion by pointing to the absence of the place where were sitting in the map. “Does anyone remember the *cachimbo* canoes that *los antiguos* [the elder] used to build?” asked Severo to the small group, “Back there when cacao was a real business?” he added.

The men agreed with him in a low and incomprehensible chorus of murmurs as if it were a classroom. Only Aparicio raised his voice to supplement Severo’s memory: “But the shade was also good for tobacco,” said the man looking upwards in search for any survival. *Cachimbos* are tall woody plants, which flourish with abundant reddish or lilac petals. Their wood is used in construction and its shade usually accompanies the growth of smaller plants keeping the ground cool. In Venezuela is sometimes known as *capa de tabaco* [tobacco coat].

A towering man, with few teeth left and hooded eyes, Aparicio was in his late seventies, and recalled that his parents were able to keep a small grove of trees where they grew their own tobacco, which as coca or marihuana today, was “very *celoso* [jealous], and had to be planted in secrecy,” said the man.

“But, the thing is that we didn’t plant for money,” said Severo now looking at me rather than the group. “It was easy to live from the land; in a few hours you could get

your gold and also take care of the crops!” affirmed Severo.

Aparicio nodded, but insisted that tobacco was very good business too. I looked at them confused for a while, until I gathered the confidence to interrupt the men: “How is that possible?” I asked, with surprise. “Was it a business, or not?”

“You see, the thing is that we were free peasants,” replicated Severo almost patronizing the old man and me. “That is what I was telling you,” he said now looking only at me again, “that is what I learned reading the booklet that I was telling you.”

Severo was referring to a pocket book in Spanish written by Michael Taussig along with Ana Rubbo. The booklet was entitled *Esclavitud y libertad en el valle de río Cauca* (1975) and appeared under the pseudonym of one of the most famous bandits of the peasant protest in the region, Mateo Mina. Accompanied by a preface by Orlando Fals-Borda, who had encouraged Taussig to choose the Cauca valley as his site for doctoral dissertation, it was the result of Taussig and Rubbo’s fifteen months research in the town of Puerto Tejada, just a few miles from where we were sitting that afternoon (1975:xvii). In many ways, the little book followed the structure and contents of Taussig’s dissertation, “Rural Proletarianization: A Social and Historical Enquiry into the Commercialization of the Southern Cauca Valley, Colombia” (1974). Nevertheless, the narrative was meant for a different audience. It was written in an accessible language and intended to serve as a reader in local schools.

“The myth,” told me Severo who cherished an old photocopy of the booklet, “is that most of the printed books were bought by rich landlords and the oligarchy of the sugarcane industry and then those books were thrown in the same furnaces of the mills,” he said. Other local residents I met in the plains, played indeed with these legends,

exaggerating or amplifying the animosity towards the book in order to call for attention on its lasting importance. After all, the advertisement and the lobby of the sugarcane industry had always portrayed a very different narrative, in which progress and development were the main leading charters.

“The cane was the problem,” concluded Aparicio, who knew very well about the *ingenious* [industrial sugarcane mills]. Now that he was “retired,” he had rented a plot to La Cabaña cane mill as a secure form of income. His humid and cool *fincas* with lots of different trees and plants, bordered now with a harsh and dry plot of sugar cane. After serving the military in 1964 he was offered a job in the industrial sugarcane mill El Naranjo (later acquired by La Cabaña), where he worked till 2000. There he performed all sorts of tasks; from planting, fertilizing, and fumigating, to opening channels for irrigation in the summer. One week he had shifts during the day and the other at night. “All that work ended when the mill mechanized its production,” he said.

“Exactly,” said Severo, “our culture was ‘*las fincas tradicionales*’ [traditional farms], they were organized in such way that little work was required to maintain cacao, coffee, and other food crops. And besides, we were preserving the forest, the riverbanks, and even wild animals,” Severo added.

“But what exactly was a *traditional farm*,” I asked trying to hear more from their interpretation.

“Well, as I told you, *las fincas tradicionales* are part of our culture. It was a different mode of production, or still is, where it survives,” Severo rushed to answer. “It was ecologically sustainable, it was an agro-forest system. We combined different plants and trees in the same place. The women also had their medical herbs and edible gardens,”

said Severo now pointing to the dense spots on the map (See Figure 20).

“*Vea* [Look], for some years now,” said Aparicio, “I’ve been watching people coming with projects about the recovery of the ‘traditional farm.’ I don’t remember exactly who, but there were associations promoting that, NGO’s and even the Agricultural Ministry at one time. They were saying that we should plant aromatic herbs and go back to plant cacao. They even tried to revive the cacao factory to help small growers. And some actually ended up exporting things, some farmers in La Caponera even placed their products in supermarkets in Cali,” he said.

As Taussig observed while surveying the region in the early 1970s, this local knowledge was of great advantage for peasant farmers. Coffee and citric trees, as well as cacaos and plantains flourished under tall trees as the *cachimbo*. The shade of these trees protected lower plants preserving humidity in dry seasons and at the same time preventing undesirable weeds to take root and thrive. Additionally, the falling leaves of trees and plants were not collected or raked as it is done in gardens today. On the contrary, the soil was improved by the moisture and compost that the fallen leaves produced and by the nutrients that free range animals added (See Figure 16). Taussig concluded, “the cycles of cocoa and coffee are such that they very neatly complement one another; when cocoa waxes, coffee wanes, and vice versa in such a manner that a fairly constant trickle of income and labor input is maintained throughout the year” (Taussig 1978:22).

Asking the elders about the continuity of this relatively regenerative and self-sustaining form of small-scale agriculture Severo commented, “people don’t harmonize the space as it was done before, and believe me that there is a quite noticeable difference

now with the global warming, the fertilizers and the pesticides. You cannot continue handling traditional farms as it was done before. When I grew up, my mom kept lots of different plants in the farm, she was a traditional doctor. She taught me to work, she made me go to school, and then back to the farm to take care of the coffee plants and other crops. It was from the Arabic kind, not that improved bean that they promote now,” he said.



Figure 16. Landscape walk in a ‘traditional farm’ in Padilla close to La Paila River.

I was reluctant to speak, but also worried to miss the chance. “The other day,” I interrupted almost instinctively, “talking to a young man in the soccer field, someone told me that the new generations don’t want to farm anymore. How do you both see that?” I asked, filling kind of guilty for rushing in.

Severo looked at me sternly: “Take a look around and tell me where is it that they are going to farm? And if for some reason you still have the privilege to split your plot among your sons, what would they do with such small pieces?” he said.

I remained silent and looked at Aparicio as a way to give him the stand: “*Vea* [look], there is also the issue that people think that *los negritos*, are only meant to work under the sun, to work the land. And that people of your color are meant for offices with air conditioning system. But why can’t those young men dream with something else?” Aparicio remarked.

Although I was completely delighted by the way the conversation was developing, I was not sure that the men were hearing each other. In my view, one was appealing to a radical difference and the other attempted to assert equality and membership to a broader society. “If you allow me this anthropological jargon,” I argued changing my passive strategy, “Aparicio is talking about likeness and you Severo, you were speaking almost about a different culture, so how do we negotiate that?”

From the house in the back, a young woman sitting in the porch interrupted the elder men that were about to defend their positions: “I am sorry, may I say something...” she paused respectfully. “Of course *mijita*, *diga* [tell me daughter],” said Severo.

“The problem is that there is no support from the government, so people ended up selling their *parcelas* [small plots]. Besides, today young people demand training to work

in the industrial parks, but there is little motivation for agriculture. At least, if you ask me I would like to have my own business. That would be nice!” she said smiling.

“*Gracias mijita*, yes we as a culture have advanced in many aspects,” said Severo trying to bring his daughter’s point of view closer to his argument, “but we are losing others. And that is what the small book is all about,” concluded Severo referencing again Taussig’s booklet.

“I read the book differently,” I protested in a friendly tone and invoking as much sympathy as I could with my body language. “In my reading, I actually thought that the book was showing how peasants in the Cauca valley were the offspring of a long process of colonialism, slavery and market involvement. Seeing things in that way meant that these ‘traditional farms’ and the ‘traditional mining’ were in fact also producing capitalism as much as the *haciendas* were.” Therefore, I said to them, that I thought that what was at stake in the book was not a notion of “culture,” but the idea of pushing an agrarian reform. “Don’t take me wrong, please,” I insisted, “I am not saying that there are no alternatives, I just don’t think it is good to see things separately,” I said.

I was expecting another stern reaction from Severo, since we had had similar conversations before and none had ended with an agreement. He knew I regarded anthropology as an art of teasing and unsettling taken for granted ideas, but this time we were not alone and my privileged skepticism toward the commonly used notions of “autonomy” and “resistance” (the aim of some predominant factions in the Afro-Colombian movement) were not a good starting point to make new friends.

“You reminded me of the discussions we had when the unions were around,” said Severo, “but those days are over.”

“Do you know what I think?” Aparicio said speaking exited and impatient, “I think that the book was written for us to have these discussions,” he said concluding the discussion.

After the conversation with Severo and the three elders from the Palo River, I went straight that night to look for my copy of Taussig’s and Rubbo’s booklet. From the initial page, the authors explicitly reveal their project:

To the memory of the peasants who died in the bloody class struggles that occurred in the Cauca river valley during the second half of the 19th century. In those times, the former slaves of the Valley almost conquered a New World for the small farmer: a world without landowners, without foreign markets, where the peasants lived in fruitful harmony with each other and with nature (Mina [Taussig’s and Rubbo’s pseudonym] 2011[1975], my translation, the underlining is mine).

The historical research that precedes Michael Taussig’s dissertation on the evolution of rural wage labor in the Valley, shows how these peasant politics and livelihoods were further intensified when slavery was finally abolished in January 1852 (Taussig 1974, 1978, 1980). Relying on ethnographic work and archival research, Taussig was able to identify a span of fifty years after manumission, where recurrent civil wars made it hard for landowners to reestablish control over the work force and assert the ownership of those parcels and plots, worked by blacks under slavery. For Taussig, this period constituted a regional disarticulation of the mine-hacienda complex and a profound economic and social disruption for large landowners who tried continually, but often with only limited or temporary success, to reassert their privileges.

Yet, as I will show in the next section, a “New World without landlords, without foreign markets, where people lived in harmony with nature” hardly existed. Although land in the plains was abundant, access to it was conditional on their linkage as labor

force in the cattle ranches and plantations. Moreover, as I will make clear next, at the very moment that landlords were being challenged by these shifting conditions, *nortecaucanos*' engagement with the new matrix of popular politics and the coming of the export boom at the end of the XIX century, should remind us about the persistent global interconnections between local histories and larger process of colonialism, state formation, and capitalist development. To be fair, in many ways, Taussig and Rubbo knew this. No doubt, the use of the word "almost," in the quote cited above, indexes an attempt to consider the subtle complexities of that "outlaw black peasantry." However, in a recent book interview, Taussig admitted that "all sorts of Western delusions" marked his initial view of the region.⁹ Still, as the dialogue with Severo and the others demonstrated, the political hopes behind those opening lines kept reemerging not only in Taussig's writings, but also in most *nortecaucanos* memories.

Popular politics and moral economies

The province of Popayán, site par excellence of royalist allegiance, endured at the beginning of the nineteenth century, long years of autonomist and revolutionary projects. The grueling fighting and political turmoil of independence wars of the 1810s and 1820s, added to the subsequent conflicts between federalists and centralists over the nature of the new government, shackled not only the precarious economy of the region still dominated by gold exports, but also exacerbated social divisions within and among landlords, merchants and subaltern groups.

As Napoleon Bonaparte invaded the Iberian Peninsula and changes in the Spanish political arena were dividing Governors in the New Granada, the patriot insurgency all

along the territories, that eventually would conform the *Gran Colombia*, grew into a full-blown independence project (Echeverri 2011).¹⁰ In this changing political landscape, subaltern groups saw diverse opportunities to redefine the terms of their relation to local elites and the Spanish Crown.¹¹ Simón Bolívar, for instance, promised freedom to slaves if they would fight for independence—a promise he also made to the president of Haiti in return for supplying him with men, arms and equipment for the war. At the time, in fact, some slaves were tempted to side with the patriots during the wars. However, these promises were not always enough to grant the patriots popular support. Royalism was also a solid option for political identification.¹² Indeed, in the early stages of the confrontation, many Indians and slaves ended up supporting Spain, given the fact that in colonial times the Crown and Church had provided them with protection against the abuses of power of local elites (Zuluaga 1986; Díaz de Zuluaga 1986).

Once royalists were defeated after more than fifteen years of battles, conservative discontent with the new state's policies (e.g. the closure of convents, and the gradual ending of slavery), lead to new conflicts where Indians and slaves were again mobilized. The approval of *libertad de vientres* [freedom of wombs], also referred to as free birth, in 1821, was welcomed among crews in mining camps and haciendas, but slave owners of the Caloto district, for instance, opposed to the law, reserving in some cases the right to apply it or not depending on their conveniences. The conflict that arose from these tensions was known as the War of the Supremes (1839-1842), referring to the *gamonales* [regional leaders], also known as *jefes supremos* [supreme chiefs], which tried to seize power and depose the president of the new republic.

The General José María Obando, born in the *hacienda* Garcia, to the east of Caloto, was one of these “supreme chiefs.” As a General during the Independence wars, Obando initially fought for the Royalist but towards the end he joined forces with Simón Bolívar. Once independence was attained he opposed Bolívar’s Centralist government conforming a revolutionary army quartered in Quilichao and promising again freedom to those who joined his forces (Escorcia 1986:82-83). However, this time he tried to secure the support of conservative landowners too, offering them compensations from government’s manumission fund. But Obando’s project proved worst for slaves. After his defeat, strict penal codes were sanctioned and large numbers of slaves were sold abroad to Peruvian traders fearing the rising tide of radical liberalism and abolition supporters (Taussig 1980: 48). Those who could took these repressions as a confirmation, that the only way out was to continue the armed uprising. Led by supporters of Obando, slaves and freeman encouraged revolts that burned and plundered farmhouses in Japio and La Bolsa (Almario 1996:83). This movement was an important precursor of other events that extended all through the Popayán province, accelerating manumission, and signaling the nightmares of slavery as an organizational referent and as a “magical word” invoked to describe many different kinds of injustice. It is against this experience, which former slaves would define themselves and their future political engagements.

In spite of these disappointments, not everything was lost for conservative landowners. On the one hand, the General and former president Tomas Cipriano de Mosquera, one of the region’s largest land and slave owner, was assigned governor of newly defined Cauca state in 1857. On the other, by the time slavery ended on December 1851, landowners had prepared hybrid categories like *concertados* and *terrajés* that

permitted transition to a new status of workers. Under the former, for a few hectares, former slaves were demanded by the *haciendas* to work part-time in the plantations. *Terrajes*, on the other hand, was a refinement of *conciertos* awarding hectares of “wild” and floodable forests to poor settlers and ex-slaves in exchange for five to ten days of work each month (Colmenares 1973). In Japio, and its sub-divisions of La Bolsa and Quintero, three hundred and thirty hectares of woods along the border of the Palo River were divided up for *terraje* amongst most of the ex-slaves (Taussig 1977:410). According to Taussig’s research, their task was to clear the land and develop a site for a village and another for cultivation, which had to produce for both parties: themselves and the *hacienda* (Taussig 1977:410). By this time Japio aimed to produce 50 hectares of sugarcane and maize, 20 hectares of plantains, yucca and arracacha, and 15.000 cacao trees (Mina 2011[1975]:73). Apparently, once the target was reached, a rent of 3 *reales* for each *fanegada* [approx. 6.400 square meters] was imposed on tenants and sharecroppers.

Thus, emancipation was more a formal procedure than a real change. Although subalterns took advantage of whatever opportunity they could find in the new political terrain opened by republicanism, legally and socially slaves, Indians, and the poor in general continued excluded and segregated. Citizenship, after 1850s, was granted only to literate male nationals over 21 years old, with either legal property worth at least 300 pesos or 150 pesos annual income (Gibson 1948:160-162). As elsewhere in Latin America, former slaves continued working the same lands under a semi-feudal system as debt laborers.



Figure 17. The *Hacienda San Julián* close to the upper Cauca River was operating at least since the nineteenth century. It attracted laborers from San Antonio, Santander de Quilichao, Domingullo, Guachené, Villarrica, La Arboleda and other places around northern Cauca (Carabalí 2007:393). Below the rubbles of the chapel. Photographs by the author.

Yet liberals' and subalterns had also prepared their own plans for the transition.¹³

The historian James Sanders, specialized in nineteenth century popular politics and State formation in Latin America, has found several records of letters in the dead archives of Cauca, referencing taxes, duties, and harassments imposed on former slaves by Caloto's parochial government (Sanders 2000:89). For instance, in 1853 inhabitants of the San Julián Hacienda (See figures 17), wrote to the Governor of the Province:

Since we ceased to depend on the man that they called our master, and we entered, due to the majesty of the law, into the category of free men, [the leaders of the town of Caloto] (...) have wanted to convert us into slaves again, of a worse nature than what we were before (quoted in Sanders 2004:305).

These attempts, of former slaves and mulattos to challenge established power relations, were heard by Liberal elites, desperate for allies in their struggle against the Conservatives. As Sanders notes, quoting a priest affiliated in 1850 with the Liberal Party,

The slaves that lose their chains bring to society gratitude for the government that has lifted the yoke off them. [...] The complete extinction of slavery is the magnum opus to which we must consecrate all of our efforts: 27,000 men that become citizens weigh something in the electoral balance (Manuel María Alaix in Sanders 2004:282).

Conservative landowners knew very well that Liberals were not stressing humanitarian concerns, but political motivations. Nonetheless, they understood, perhaps better than Liberals that through appropriating and expanding the meanings of liberalism subalterns were transforming an elite political organization into their own party (Sanders 2000). In a letter wrote to the Governor of the Province a politician insisted:

[former slaves are convinced] that they are oppressed, that they are tyrannized, and that through these means [taxes] we want to return them to slavery, which is the magic word that they employ in these situations (Bautista Feijoo quoted in Sanders 2000:90).

Democratic societies (liberal political clubs) and National Guards (militias in the eventuality politics extended to the battlefield) began to operate since the late 1840's in cities and small towns throughout the Cauca and the country. Envisioned as a vehicle to promote the election of Liberal presidents, these societies and mobilizations ended up producing a powerful popular movement that had an important part in loosening *hacendados'* grip on local politics and society and inculcate a brand new sense of citizenship. Through public ceremonies of manumission and discourses of rights and citizenship, these clubs and societies gathered dispossessed peoples and former slaves from the surrounding *haciendas* of the countryside (Pacheco 1992). A description of one these events and ceremonies can be found in the following testimony:

One such spectacle in Cali, began with speeches in the Democratic Society and culminated in the central plaza with an emancipation ceremony for 46 slaves. After music and cannon fire, three chosen slaves, each bearing a standard with "liberty," "equality," and "fraternity" emblazoned upon it, came forward to a table where the *Junta de Manumisión* presented them with certificates of freedom. As each new freedman left the table, Liberal women placed a garland of flowers on his or her head (Ramón Mercado, Narciso Riascos, Manuel Antonio Vernaza et al. quoted in Sanders 2004:283).

Besides these emancipation ceremonies, newspapers were read aloud in the club meetings, and courses were also held on the meaning of democracy, constitution, and the rights and duties concerning elections and republican life (Sanders 2000:130). Japio's owner received in the mid 1870's a letter from his son; expressing his preoccupation over the increasingly virulent Liberal attacks on the Church and property

that occurred in this clubs:

In the last session of the local Democratic Club, mainly attended by blacks, they were saying that the aim of the Conservatives is to make a new revolution in order to re-enslave all the blacks. The Conservatives are believed to be saying, 'Slavery or the gallows for all blacks!' What is more, the blacks state that the Conservatives are not true believers but feign Catholicism in order to deceive; the only true Catholics are the Liberals (quoted in Taussig 1974:62).

Already, during the independence wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century the *hacienda* suffered badly when armies, both royalist and patriots, used it as supply source (Sendoya 1975:133). But, right after abolition the civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives, drove the Liberal president and general Jose Hilario López to confiscate the *hacienda* and deliver a speech to the former slaves, speaking of Arboleda as tyrant and extolling the spirits of revenge (Llanos 1979:22). Almost a year later after the estates were confiscated, Sergio Arboleda —a member of the family clan that owned the hacienda Japio from 1777 till 1890— stated that “anarchy took over” on the banks of the Palo River close to La Bolsa and “so great was the horror that infested those woods, that nobody dared try to reach an agreement with the *terrazgueros*. I myself was too afraid to enter in there” (Arboleda in Taussig 1980:49). Having achieved their position as freemen, the *libertos* were probably able to negotiate or avoid completely the price for land rentals. Other landowners as Joaquín Mosquera who had mines in the Caloto area, were even forced to accept the counter-proposals made by their former slaves (Taussig 1977: 410, Correa González 1987:235).

Once confrontations decreased in 1862, a small portion of the land was distributed among the peasant soldiers who had accompanied the liberal rebellions, but on the whole no substantial land reform took place. Most subalterns, simply occupied and inhabited the

heavily forested margins of hacienda lands, along the riverbanks or on *indiviso* and *ejidos* [inalienable lands inherited from a common ancestor].¹⁴ Quotes from the last will of Sergio Arboleda at the end of the century, provides a glance on how this period was experienced by *hacendados*:

In the first six years of my marriage, I redeemed some counts, paid several debts, re-built large parts of my houses in Popayán, and made other improvements in my *haciendas*; but the manumission of slaves, in which a very considerable portion of my capital consisted, and the seizure and ruin of my property in the civil war of 1851 to 1853, dissolved the profits that may have existed until then. From 1854 to 1860 I managed to restore and greatly improve my properties, but the improvements that I put in them, although they compensated and surpassed the previous losses, disappeared before they could be appreciated. My wife died at the beginning of the devastating civil war of 1860 to 1863, and I could not do an adequate funeral, because my property was seized and confiscated, and I was absent, first in service to the Republic and then exiled until 1866. When these properties were returned to me after four years, eight months after being stripped of them, they were completely ruined. According to the judicial estimation of the experts, the value of the lost capital, without counting the rents, exceeded only in Japio and Quintero, forty-five thousand pesos [\$ 45,000] (A.C.C. en Llanos 1979:21-22, my translation).

Local and regional historiography have framed in fact this period as a moment of economic crisis, where *haciendas*' discipline and articulations declined, and certainly, former enslaved populations must have taken advantage of owners' absence and of the rising of liberal revolts (Díaz de Zuluaga 1986, Escorcía 1986). But Taussig went even further. In accordance with the "resistance" and "agentive" focus of some of the ethnographies of the 1980s, Taussig described how under these circumstances, former slaves developed a sort of "outlaw black peasantry," sometimes even referred in his writings as a "new social class that stood outside society" (Taussig 2008 [1977], 1979:102).

In *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980), Taussig depicts again, these "free peasants" as bearers of a "natural" economy, completely detached from

exchange value and almost historically disconnected from the particular relations to material production and mercantilism, imposed by more than three centuries of colonialism. As it was expected, it didn't take too long for scholars to criticize these ideas from several angles. Among the most conciliatory, some authors just tried to lessen his radical emphasis on a "natural non-market economy" (da Matta 1986), others criticized his idealized view of pre-capitalist times (Marcus 1986, Roseberry 1989), but other comments were more incisive and acute, attacking the assumptions behind the idea of a "dual economy," which at the end of the day was sadly related to the modernization theories that stalked Latin America since the mid twentieth century (Trouillot 1986).

In fairness, Taussig's analysis was not always that polarizing. There are several instances in his long and detailed historical analysis where he acknowledges how even escaped slaves ensconced securely deep in the woods along the Palo River bordering Arboleda's estates, were not completely isolated or living strictly on a "natural non-market economy." Some of these groups were in fact cultivating high-grade tobacco since the last quarter of the eighteenth century and clandestinely producing about one-twelfth of the valley's entire crop (Taussig 1980:47). Later when describing the "squatters" and cane laborers of the mid twentieth century in the valley, Taussig struggles to find a middle ground where these "lower classes" are presented as "liminal beings, neither peasant nor truly proletarian" (Taussig 1980:103) As "neither what they were, nor yet what they will become," the position of these half-peasants/half-proletarians, he argues, was "both negation and affirmation of all structural positions" (Taussig 1980:103).

A shared perception among landowners —desperate to capture labor force and

consumers— insisted that small farmers only planted and cultivated “that which they needed to consume in their houses” (Gaceta Oficial del Cauca, Popayán, 27 April 1867). But as entrepreneurs, landlords also had plans for improving this perceived condition. Sergio Arboleda was reported, not only to advise and decide on what should his tenants invest the surplus production obtained on their own time and plots, but also appears to have invested at the end of each year, parts of the production of the hacienda in livestock to familiarize and train tenants in market economy (Mina 2011[1975]:750).

But householders were not just passive agents waiting to be instructed. Actually, farmers grew a variety of crops to sell in local markets. From corn, rice, plantains, yucca and beans, to cacao, tobacco, and sugar cane. What prohibited some landowners to recognize these active engagements was that, at the time, most of these activities were clandestine, as it happened with tobacco and *aguardiente* [raw cane liquor]. Obtaining a license for small-scale distilling and selling of *aguardiente*, was not only heavily taxed, but also, to some extent, forbidden, due to the monopoly conformed by conservative *hacendados* allied with the Catholic Church (Sanders 2004:182). As for tobacco, before 1850, the government also demanded growing permits and occasionally enforced controls sending officers to prosecute farmers around Quilichao that didn’t pay the corresponding tributes (Díaz Casas 2015:155-162).

Despite these restrictions, tenants and sharecroppers used at least two strategies to secure their own production and livelihoods. On the one hand, using Democratic Societies and liberal ideas of “freedom of industry,” many *nortecaucanos* residents complained not only that the monopoly and taxes hurt their livelihoods, but also contested the statutes that forced freedmen to work for their former *haciendas* (Sanders

2004:288). On the other hand, *nortecaucanos* did not put all their bets in legislative changes. Rather they also acted on their own developing skilled clandestine techniques for trading their goods. For instance, as Aparicio would tell me days after our encounter in *La Cachimbada*, people managed very often to transport in *champán* or *balsadas* [vernacular bamboo rafts] small quantities of goods (legal and illegally) that were traded in towns and ports along the Cauca (See Figures 18).

During the export boom of tobacco around 1850s, Julio Arboleda sent a letter to the president of the republic Tomas Cipriano de Mosquera, which not fortuitously happened to be his uncle too, expressing his concern about this clandestine market:

Clandestine tobacco sowings are immense there [Caloto sub district]. It can be calculated that there are more than 1000 people dedicated exclusively to that illicit industry. Officials cut down only the few plants that can be found near the areas of open land, sometimes purposely set up by the smugglers to distract them from the best and most extensive crops they are sure to have in the jungle. The *manumitidos* [free slaves] are gathering as soon as they start to enjoy their freedom and they are taking part of that horde of criminals who steal 10 or 20 cattle, as they plant 10 or 20,000 tobacco plants in lands that they don't own. This evil is spreading a lot (...) In nine or ten years the devil is going to take those of us who have properties on that damn side of Caloto. The new *libertos* will be masters of all our lands, there will be no tenants or day laborers because it is better to be a smuggler (Arboleda in Díaz Casas 2015:158-159).

From the above letter, photographs, and other records from *haciendas* like *La Manuelita*, which reported increase in the export of tobacco produced by small tenants in 1870s (Eder 1981:338-400), it is possible to note that these economies were not exclusively subsistence level farming as Taussig and even Severo and the elders had suggested. They were also producing and selling goods in significant amounts.



Figure 18. Above, Plantain and bamboo market on the riverbanks of the Cauca River, Juanchito. Santiago de Cali, 1923. s. n., s. n. & s. n. (1923). 200007, APFFV. Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garcés Borrero. // Below, *Balsas en Puerto Mallarino*. Santiago de Cali, 1925. Erich Barth (1925). 102532. APFFV. Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garcés Borrero.

“I have heard from the elders great stories about that,” said Aparicio looking at a couple of chickens scratching the earth beneath plantain leaves. “People used to smuggle tobacco and *aguardiente* along these waters. Using, for instance, the hollow compartments in bamboo poles, they were able to hide bottles of *aguardiente* and bales of tobacco. Everything in those *champáns* [rafts] was for sale, even the *guadua* that constituted the raft itself. So, for instance, they dismantled the ship let’s say in Juanchito or in Puerto Tejada and then when they sold the poles they were also selling the liquor, and nobody except for those involved in the deal had to know.”

The whole trip was in any case a risky business. Sometimes even the sole bamboo was considered illegal. Since *haciendas* often used it for fencing and constriction, *mayordomos* [administrators] were on constant guard in case it suddenly turned up in markets for sale (ACC, Fondo Arboleda, Sig. 447). A couple of days later, a neighbor of Aparicio explained me how his father use to tell him, that he grew up sleeping under tobacco leaves being dry on long cords: “*O santo vendido*, said my father, *thank havens for this plant which smells great and worth as silver*. He had also other crops, but there was always space for tobacco, both for consumption and for trading in the market of the Palo River. He once bought a *yegua* [mare] from the *hacienda* using those earnings,” the man remembered with proud.

These memories of interconnection and the strategies and assessments that they required from each individual are telling: How to smuggle goods? How much to plant for consumption or for local markets? What to do with the profits? Therefore, as Sidney Mintz and others like Michel Rolf Trouillot have long insisted the sociocultural relevance of these provision grounds, even before abolition and under the harshest possible

conditions of slavery, should not be interpreted only to conjure images of sublime resistance (Mintz 1978, Trouillot 2002). In this sense, ignoring or not the landlords, paying the rentals or refusing to do so, through these small plots and clandestine exchanges, former slaves learned the planning of farm production, a sense of private property, and the management of capital and markets. An example, registered by the historian Francisco Zuluaga, illustrates well this situation, where small peasant plots began to be seen as commodities that could be enjoyed for many years and could be object of transaction. From 1897 to 1913, Francisco Viáfara, a black peasant from Caloto, built, at his own expense, a small farm of cacao, coffee, plantains and grass, which he sold to Joaquín Bermúdez and the latter, in turn, to Genaro Paz and Manuel de la Paz Viveros (Zuluaga 2010:106).

Not even the establishment armed settlements constituted a complete rupture with *haciendas* and their insipient but emergent export system. On the contrary, in many cases it constituted a strategic positioning in the interstices of the same system. Although some refused wage work and preferred to alternate independent small farming and gold mining, after abolition a good number remained attached to the market economy either through strategies like the *concertados* and *terrajés* or through clandestine exchanges. According to Taussig's archival research, by the end of slavery, forty percent of Arboleda's work force was already tied as *concertados* (1975:68). By 1871, Sergio Arboleda instructed the administrators of Japio, Quintero and La Bolsa in the following terms:

All those who inhabit both in Japio and in Quintero must pay *terraje* divided in two counts [approximately 40 *pesos* a year] (...) and each one must grant a document. There are many who have not granted any document and it is necessary to cross all the lands to know who they are and oblige them to recognize *terraje* or to leave the land. Those who resist, or that are in evasion having their semester expired must be obliged

by the judge to pay and be disposed from the land. To do this is good to advise first with some notification giving them a proper time. Once this time is passed the house must be demolished” (Arboleda in Mina 2011[1975]:93).

Moreover, apparently the “anarchy” mentioned by Sergio Arboleda in 1860s did not prohibit Japio to produce “about 90,000 lb. of molasses a year, as compared with 2,500 lb. in 1789 and 78,000 in 1838” (Taussig 1980:59). Therefore, those protests and complains on the part of *hacendados*, should also be considered a way to attract government’s attention. And to some extent it worked. “Good and patriotic citizens,” along with police forces, received at that time wide powers to force work on *haciendas*. Constant offensive against rural liberal guerrillas (heavily drawn from the black peasantry) enabled landowners to return to the position of exerting pressure over labor.

At the same time, legal and clandestine economies were boosted with new regional interconnections, which demanded from merchants and landowners other ways to regain influence over peasant cultivators and squatters. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the arrival of settlers from different parts of the country to the northern limits of the Great Cauca (mainly Antioqueño migrants) opened a new market for *haciendas* and small farmers in the Cauca Valley, increasing the demand of cacao, tobacco, and meat (Londoño 2013:168-169).

Additionally, by the late 1860s, the route to the Pacific Ocean, across the western Cordillera, had been improved to level of a *camino de rueda*, allowing a significant increase in exports and trade. Between 1869-1874, the harbor of Buenaventura received 378 merchant ships that constantly connected the region with the international hub in Panama (Sanders 2000:43). By 1876, the value of trade reached the amount of two

million pesos as compared with \$85,000 in the mid-nineteenth century (Eder in Taussig 1974:59).

Thus, to conclude, at the very moment that landlords were being challenged by these shifting conditions, the number of boom and bust cycles in different kinds of products (e.g. Cacao, rice, tobacco, coffee) at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century should remind us about the persistent global interconnections between local histories and larger process of colonialism, state formation, and capitalist development (Andrews 1997). While the case of Colombia's Cauca Valley cannot be compared to the core zones of export production (e.g. Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic), mainly due to civil unrest and the lack of proper export corridors and capital to rebuild *haciendas*, this didn't meant for black peasants a romantic "return to nature," or a supposed departure from history, markets and capitalism.

Final remarks

I have tried to develop in this chapter a historiographical and ethnographic contextualization of northern Cauca not for the sake of constructing an image of resistance and Otherness, but as an attempt to expose the sedimented landscapes under their current configuration. Without obscuring the harsh conditions of slavery, the narratives and archival records laid out through this chapter, have helped to show the ways in which enslaved populations also shaped and transform the institution of slavery forming alliances, breaking the law, and establishing relations with other society members.

In this chapter, I have argued that *nortecaucanos* narratives and practices regarding the mine-hacienda complex, and the institution of slavery, are intricately intertwined with a sense of place, mobility, and interconnection that goes beyond their own experiences. Connecting the monotonous terrains of the western cordillera with the floodplains of the Cauca Valley, this complex (as a particular productive unit, based primarily on slave labor and the production of metals, cattle, and agricultural products) was responsible for establishing population centers, relocating laborers, and attracting residents across the province. Despite its partial participation in local and wider markets, these interconnections, made *hacienda* lands (at least in the Caloto area) a “true social arrangement,” even capable of offering incipient forms of urban life (Colmenares 1992:38; 1990:22). In fact, as this chapter has shown, the main towns, such as Caloto, were mostly administrative centers with relatively little commerce. However, the areas bordering the vast estates and mining centers from Santander de Quilichao, till the Palo and La Paila Rivers, were instead giving life to diverse subsistence activities and relations of commerce to merchants, manumitted, runaway, and born free.

But not only was a matter of economic interconnection. Pursuing membership in the new postcolonial republic, via contesting the institution of slavery, and later including questions of land, taxes and rights, *nortecaucanos*, along with other rural subalterns in the nineteenth century, managed to be part of a political bargaining that “succeeded in making liberalism their own” (Sanders 2004:278). Although, these liberal discourses, intricately linked with the new matrix of citizenship and rights, incubated to some extent the “myths” of “racial democracy” that nationalist intellectuals all throughout Latin America would cherish in the early twentieth century, *nortecaucanos* also engage them as

a means to enter the nation's public, political life and improve their social and material conditions.¹⁵ In the early nineteenth century, *Nortecaucanos* were indeed using slavery as a magical word to counter attempts by landowners to return them to slavish conditions. Yet, ideas associated with a specific racial or cultural identification were not present at the time. Instead, slavery was, in the initial years of the Republic, the invoked trope in both emergent forms of popular liberalism and popular royalist.

Appropriating very early the discourses of rights as citizens, *nortecaucanos* also developed after manumission a “moral economy” which influenced, and at the same time, shaped ideals and visceral meanings regarding social justice, wellbeing, and development.¹⁶ They might have not celebrate progress as the *Antioqueño* migrants that started to arrive in the Valley since the late nineteenth century, but neither were they bearers of a “natural” economy completely detached from exchange value, as a predominant literature has argued (e.g. Taussig).¹⁷ Indeed, through an examination of frequent tropes and periodizations in the literature, the chapter has called upon scholars to think more carefully about the ways of representing the rise of the “free peasantry” after emancipation and the later period of working-class formation. My aim in doing this has not been directed to unfold a pure textual exegesis. On the contrary, I have tried to focus my attention on how these sustained narratives and historical “periods” have become part of *nortecaucano*'s ways of understanding and experiencing their lives and struggles.

Mateo Mina's (Taussig's and Rubbo's pseudonym) little book, has served here as reminder that the terms in which anthropologists once described these groups, terms that now some scholars acknowledged inadequate as analytics, did not pass without notice by inhabitants and locals. On the contrary, these terms, now essentialized and even

commodified by multicultural and environmental discourses, are returning to haunt *nortecaucano*'s landscapes. Assuming that this period of "free peasantry" meant a romantic "return to nature," or a supposed departure from history, markets, and capitalism was perhaps a strong and powerful referent for the black cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when a revived sugarcane industry restricted their access to land and drove many people into wage labor. However, as I will explore in further chapters debating cultural and mining politics, this stance also foreclosed important political and theoretical debates, as well as possible grounds for action.

Chapter 3. Developing a land populated by ‘demons’

The flight from Newark to the upper Cauca Valley took nine hours. The plane approached the city of Cali before the sun went down behind the Andean western cordillera. Large sugarcane fields unfolded under my window like a patchwork quilt with small squares on fire. Sugarcane industry in the valley still uses prescribed burn before harvest in order to remove leafy material and stalk tops. This procedure is said to be crucial to reduce transportation and processing costs.

Having been raised in this region adds to this view a particular inflection. Despite the considerable impact on working conditions and public health, the black snow and the savory smell generated from these burnings has been for long time been part of my sense of place. From the privileged point of view of the city, the red smoke in the horizon and the ashes that landed at my feet have sadly always made me feel at home. The first time I sang a lullaby to my son, it was a tune about a sugarcane train that I myself had heard in my childhood (See Figure 19). I didn’t remember the whole lyric, but singing it to my son made me realize how deep rooted these feelings were:

*Qué será lo que allá viene
en un día de calor,
es un trencito cañero
trabajando con ardor
(...)*

What is it that is coming
on a hot day,
It is a small sugarcane train
working with vivacity
(...)

*Trencito cañero
que rueda por la calle,
trencito de mi valle
que lindo eres tú*

Little sugarcane train
that rolls down the street,
little train from my valley
how cute you are

But, “structures of feeling” are usually not discrete experiences.¹ The man sitting next to me in the airplane leaned over to catch a glimpse of the Valley. I moved back gently to provide him a good view through the small window. “Isn’t this great?” he said, “I always marvel of what we have achieved here.” When I asked him for clarification about his conceptions of “achievement” and “greatness,” the man, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, stared at me as if he was trying to figure out my intentions: “Are you an environmentalist?” he asked defiantly.

Although I was extremely curious about his way of seeing and experiencing the Valley, I was caught off guard by what his tone and words elicited in me. I was immediately transported to Richard White’s essay, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” (1995), which discussed how modern environmentalism was usually unable to understand nature through work. Instead, most practitioners imagined a pristine world, which if left alone, it will revert back to its perfect balance. However, that was not my view. I wasn’t trying to question the sugarcane industry in favor of an untouched landscape. While I was struggling to find a way to explain to my travel companion my evident discrepancy with his conceptions of “achievement” and “greatness,” he went ahead explaining that he was not a large estate owner. He was an independent engineer educated in the state university of the Valley during the expansion stage of the sugarcane cluster (1960s).



Figures 19. Road trains of coupled trucks haul the cane from the plantations to be refined or used in the creation of ethanol. A small sign in the back of the truck reads: *Disculpe las molestias estamos generando progreso para la region* [Excuse us for the inconvenience we are generating progress for the region]. Photographs by the author.

“Fifty years ago these lands were all swamps,” the man added, now smiling and trying to ease the tension. “In the best case scenario you could find cattle herds and dirt roads, but there was no industry, no organized agriculture.” His face was now full of pride. After all, that industry and “organized agriculture,” had been responsible for his first formal job and present economic solvency.

Since the 1950s, as I will highlight in this chapter, agricultural development in Colombia increasingly drew international attention transforming sites, as the Cauca Valley, into important centers of a global network in tropical agronomy and livestock. As many other young engineers of his generation, the engineer in the plane had been hired in one of the many industries that were flourishing at the height of the so-called “Green Revolution.” Reading biographies of local entrepreneur related to the sugarcane industry and responsible for most development projects in the region, it is easy to find similar stories of entitlement and belonging deeply rooted in their capacities to transform the land through work.² David M. Hughes’ work (2006, 2010) in post-independence Zimbabwe has been inspirational in building this perspective. On the semi-arid highlands, white large-scale farmers transformed their environment with dams and reservoirs in a manner that made possible a sense of belonging and affiliation with the land rather than with surrounding societies (Hughes 2006). A variation of this theme was experienced in the Cauca River Valley.

When the wheels touched ground many people on board the airplane, including the engineer, clapped their hands expressing joy for being safely back in their homeland. Some of that joy, as it could be expected, reverberated in the department anthem — Colombia’s equivalent of a state. Its lyrics were full of similar expressions of affect and

pride towards the Valley and its industry. Composed in 1961, the anthem describe a paradise land where the crops grow abundantly thanks to river, the sun, and richness of the soil:

Coro

*Salve Valle del Cauca mi tierra,
verdes campos de vida y solaz;
paraíso de sol donde brillan
la llanura, la sierra y el mar.*

I

*Bajo el límpido azul de tu cielo
riega el Cauca los campos en flor;
y el arado fecunda en tu suelo
frutos de oro de miel y de amor.*

Chorus

Hail Valle del Cauca my land,
green fields of life and solace;
sun paradise where the plains,
the mountains and the sea shine.

I

Under your limpid blue sky
The Cauca River irrigates the
blooming fields;
and the plow fertilizes in your
soil golden fruits of honey and
love.

Yet, commentators during the nineteenth century described a less joyful and praising side of this landscape. After the wars of independence in the first decades of the century and the Liberals' ascendancy to power in 1849, commentators in Popayán and *hacendados* in Caloto and Cali often described the region as “a beautiful hell” (Sanders 2000: 42-43, Arboleda quoted in Díaz Casas 2015:158-159, Valencia 1988:145-147). For some Liberal Party members, “hell” was the way in which elite classes exercised their power over poor residents and *terrazgueros* [poor settlers and ex-slaves awarded hectares of “wild” and floodable forests in exchange for five to ten days of work each month]. For conservative *hacendados*, “hell” was the rupture of the “peace and tranquility of slavery.” Seen from the perspective of Santiago Eder, a U.S. citizen graduated from Harvard and

established as consul in the center of the Valley since 1860s, the unprofitability of the region could only be explained in terms of a land populated by ‘demons:’

The struggle between God and Satan did not culminate, as it is believed with the defeat of the devil but in a truce. When discussing the terms of the peace treaty, Satan demanded for himself the Cauca region, the masterpiece of creation: an earthly paradise. Reluctantly, God agreed to surrender what was demanded but could not resist asking Satan: ‘And now that you have that land, what are you going to do with it?’ The demon replied: ‘Populate it with those whom I do not tolerate in hell’ (Eder quoted in Valencia 1988:145, my translation).

The Colombian anthropologist Margarita Serje (2005) refers to these images of otherness as a product of a modern project of nation building enforced in Colombia’s frontier lands. She denotes these practices as *El revés de la Nación* [The reverse of the Nation], that is, a geography of imagination where the frontier is inhabited by deviant others—Afro-Colombians, indigenous people, mestizo settlers, rural poor, etc. (Serje 2005). The frontier, more than a place, ends up being a project of civilization. Therefore, for someone as Santiago Eder, who was commercially well connected with traders in London, New York, and Panama, this “demon’s land” had a solution. In a letter to U.S. Second Secretary of State in 1872, Eder described the region as one of the most fertile places and richest in resources in the world, whose exploitation only awaited U.S. support (Eder 1981:150-151).

This chapter explores how infrastructures, technical knowledge, economic practices, and public policies, made a “paradise” of this alleged “hell” inhabited by deviant others. It uses ethnography, development reports, and archival records to explore how the Valley, portrayed by the engineer in the airplane as an “achievement,” was brought into being by transforming the landscape and the populations who would later

identify themselves in the 1990s as *comunidades negras* [black communities]. The social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century, combined with the Cauca Valley's own project of governing through jobs and infrastructural innovations throughout the early 20th century contributed to imagine an order that not only articulated race, nature, and difference, but also forms of aspiring economic development, and entrepreneurship.

The chapter covers from Pan-American efforts of infrastructure integration, hemispheric hydraulic and agricultural modernization initiatives, and agrarian reforms that fostered the expansion of the agroindustry in the region, to contemporary policies for industrial development (e.g. Law Páez 1995), “free trade” agreements, and corporate “social responsibility” initiatives (e.g. UN Global Compact). Yet, instead of assuming that the region was a victim of discourses and projects of infrastructural development or scientific agriculture throughout the early 20th century, as sometimes stated in one-sided assumptions about United States influence over the region, I argue that the Cauca Valley with its own problems and ideas, as well as with the exchange of expert knowledge, coproduced and exported what essentially became a model of development for other countries.

This yearned paradise was, however, not constructed without friction. There are not only “phenomenologies of nature” and “politics of dwelling” that demands us to consider that other worlds were possible, but there are also “ways in which the materiality of landscapes asserts its own performative autonomy in the construction of spaces, bodies, and populations (Barry 2013, Cruikshank 2005, Larkin 2013, Scott 2009). Both require, as Donald S. Moore has argued for the context of Zimbabwe, engaging an analytic of “entanglement” in the formation of landscapes (Moore 2005:17-25). This

means, linking historically sedimented processes, with micropractices of place, and struggles over territory. Here, the region's territorial and social order "emerges as a distinctive mixture, not as an enduring essence" (Moore 2005:20).

One of the contributions of this chapter is to look at development plans and infrastructure beyond a state optic that merely operates as a "project of legibility and simplification" (Scott 1998). This chapter insists also on the importance of paying attention to its constitutive relations and emergent effects, to the life worlds that such systems shape and transform, to the complicated emotional investments that operate at the level of knowledge, imagination, and desires (Ferguson 1999, Li 2007, Larkin 2013, Harvey and Knox 2013). Since such possibilities and conditions are not equally distributed, their effects are non-linear, their boundaries are not self-contained, and their outcomes are not always as expected. For instance, as I will show in the last section of this chapter, to landless industrial workers in the flatlands around Villarica, and Guachené, the endless fields of sugarcane plantations and the shine of recent metalized industrial zones generated also contradictory desires for improvement, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility. In this vein, the extractive labor regimes explored in previous chapters, and the agricultural, infrastructural and entrepreneur developments discussed in this chapter are not reducible to a linear and progressive trajectory of 'governing space,' but are coexisting to produce differentially distributed spatialities and structures of difference in the northern Cauca region.

Articulating race, nature, and difference

With the end of the nineteenth century civil wars (1860-1862 and 1876-1877), the new republic apparently found itself finally ahead of its ballasting colonial past. The abolition

of slavery, the establishment of democracy, and the triumph of liberalism, forecasted a glorious entrance to modern times. In the eyes of Liberal elites, only a few minor adjustments were needed. Despite the ideas about the capacity of populations and markets to bring about its own improvement, the new Liberal State education had a part in setting the conditions for such improvement. As a form of disciplining, the education system was supposed not only to produce enlightened citizens and redeem “deviant others,” but also help to solve the purported problems of economic stagnation, labor unrest, and social disorder. Writing in a local paper in Popayán, a supporter of the Liberal Party argued in 1864 that education would inspire fraternity among the people:

Found popular schools, where the child of the poor man and the man of color learn to read and write at the side of the child of the rich and white, and you will have an enlightened *pueblo* (*La Unión* quoted in Sanders 2000:290).

But “modernity” was a risky experiment for many elites and subalterns alike, who felt that their religion, family, and property, were all under imminent threat (Sanders 2000:305-322). For Catholic societies —founded by conservatives as a direct response to the liberal education system and to the attacks on the property and privileges of the Church—, the emphasis on rights and equality could only encourage the reluctance of the poor to labor for others, inciting revolts instead of order and progress (Valencia 1988:141-146). Indeed, the generalized destructions of the civil wars, had left many conservatives feeling worried about the liberals’ ability to control their popular allies. The looting of *haciendas* and cattle ranches, and especially the sack of Cali in 1876 — at the hands of an army conformed mostly by former enslaved population attempting to roust out conservative rebels that had seized the city—, was the last straw that broke the camel’s back.³

These conflicts and political instabilities, fostered in both Parties negative assumptions about *Nortecaucano* peasants' work ethic and qualities for citizenship, especially when compared to *Antioqueño* migrants and smallholders. The spatial organization of politics and the economy during colonial times provided the context in which regional markers and categorizations of people began to be deployed in the nineteenth century for mapping the newly independent nation. In these emerging representation *Antioquia* and its inhabitants emerged as industrious, orderly, and peaceful, while *Caucanos* appeared lazy, violent, and morally inferior.⁴

Friedrich Von Schenck, a German geographer and economist, traveled through the region in 1880, scrutinizing the geographic and social environment in its eagerness to find new markets of the growing European industry:

(...) In the woods that enclose the Cauca Valley vegetate many blacks whom one could equate with the maroons of the West Indies. Whether because of crimes that were too grave even for the permissive Caucan justice, or whether because of the simple desire to return to a savage state typical of their race, what is certain is that searching for solitude in the woods, where they regress once again slowly to the customs of their African birthplace as one commonly sees in the interior of Haiti. These people are tremendously dangerous especially in times of revolution, when they get together in gangs and enter the struggle as valiant fighters in the service of whatever hero of liberty who promises them booty (...) *Los Caucanos* generally do not enjoy very good reputation. Mortality is very large in all classes of the population, but especially among the low, and in reference to family life, the *Caucano* must be seen as the antipode of the *Antioqueño* (Von Schenck 1953:42-45).

Scientific racism was at the door, and with it the worries for the growing popular politics began to transform slowly into fears of “anarchy and savagery.” Or in the words of the U.S. consul Eder: into fears of a land “populated by demons.” In the eyes of a Swiss history and philosophy professor, hired by the Colombian government to teach in Bogotá, the provinces of Cauca were a prosperous and fertile land in 1884:

(...) but greater would be its blessings if blacks worked more, if people gave up to less to the *dolce far niente* and cultivated their land more carefully; if nature would have been less generous with these men, and if they had convenient communication routes through which they could exchange with other countries, then the Cauca would truly be a paradise and would support as the sociologists predicted twenty million inhabitants (André says fifty million). But during the civil wars, during rebellions, this paradise turns into hell, scenery for all passions and place of all barbarism (Röthlisberger 1993[1929]:399, my translation).

Yet, the above passage was not unique. It belonged to a familiar genre, to a particular way of articulating race, nature and difference (Moore et al. 2003). From the early nineteenth century, enlightened travelers as Humboldt and Bonpland described South America as a landscape that held a spell over the visitor. The spell, however, could take you either to magical places, or directly to madness. One can go “mad if the wonders don’t stop soon,” said Bonpland (quoted in Wulf 2015:57). But both botanists had one thing for sure:

The agricultural diligence of the peoples and almost all the primitive civilizations of the human race is in opposite relation to the fertility of the soil and with the goodness of the nature that surrounds them. The poorer the land is, and the more invincible the obstacles people face, the stronger the forces of man are stimulated, and the earlier they are developed through their use (quoted in Mora 2005:83, my translation).

Proud of their scientific approach, Humboldt and Bonpland struggled to come up with a systematic method of studying such exuberance. Humboldt believed that “nature speaks to man in a voice that is familiar to his soul” (quoted in Wulf 2015:61), and he wasn’t wrong. Environmental determinism was the core of his soul.

But, in bringing the nation into the equation, local intellectuals did their part too. Agustín Codazzi, the Italo-Venezuelan soldier and cartographer, was commissioned in 1849 to produce a comprehensive chorographic description of the Republic of the New

Granada and its provinces considering specially natural resources, gathering census data, as well as surveying possible means of transportation and obstacles for integration.

Elaborated in the form of a travel account, *La Comisión Corográfica* [The Chorographic Commission] proceeded as a second conquest of the national territory (Arias 2007, Appelbaum 2016). This time, not only reaching remote areas where conquistadors had had poor achievements, but also providing the means and signifiers for constructing a novel “national identity” supported on *mestizos*’ promoted will to improve and thrive:

The plantains, a little maize and a few cacao and sugar cane, barely serve for daily consumption, while fish and wild pig abound. The descendants of the African race are only content with these things; their needs are almost none. Nude lives the man, and the woman with a simple *paruma* or *guayuco*, or a rag tied to the waist; With the palms that they have at hand they construct their miserable shacks and the bark of the *damagua* tree is their bed, like a blanket *pastusa* serves him at night as cover. When the family wants to buy a change of clothes, they go to the rivers or streams and with the *bateas* in hand they submerge to remove the sands or take them from the banks and wash, until they recover the *castellanos* of gold necessary for their purchases, then returning to their homes to enjoy the sweet *farniente* [leisure], smoking, talking, sleeping and for pleasure the man sometimes walks the mountain in search of the *zaino* or *tatabro*, while the woman in her canoe goes to visit her *comadres* (Codazzi [1853] 1959: 324, my translation).

Codazzi’s depiction was meant for the Pacific lowlands, but his practice of referring to an “African race” as a category of people tied to “unruly” and “bounty” environments, which supposedly reinforced laziness, existed in everyday practice. Other representations by scientist of the Chorographic Commission went even further, arguing a connatural inferiority of black populations (Santiago Pérez in Arocha 1984:35). In fact, cartographic techniques played a crucial role in the imagining and managing of territories, frontiers, and otherness. Just as the birth of the clinic established an alliance “between words and things, enabling one to see and to say” (Foucault 1975:xii), the modern mapping

techniques of geography produced a spatial and symbolic object that appeared as a preexisting order.⁵

Members of the local elite, as well as travelers, believed that that black peasants indeed belonged to the densely wooded and marshy areas where the sun penetrated less. The evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer began to be used to rationalize the position of domination of white elites defending “the survival of the fittest” and a “free economic competence” (Arocha 1984). These scientific discourses, which justified among other things the existence of populations with bodies capable of heavy labor and resistant to the inclement conditions of the tropics, would suit later the recruitment of laborers for the nascent coffee economy and the sugarcane industry. The imagining and managing of territories, frontiers, and otherness needed however infrastructural materialization.

Governing through infrastructural innovations

As the old *haciendas*, rooted in slavery, were wasting their energies and scarce capital restricting and depriving nature’s bounty to force tenants of to work, and liberals were struggling to maneuver the land question poised by squatters and poor peasants that supported them during the wars, a rising and makeshift commercial network understood the situation as an opportunity. Instead of a sense of economic crisis, and a supposed retreat to “feudal” or “non-marked economies,” regional elites associated with European and U.S. merchants were rehearsing, with its differential positions, a brand new understanding of economic forces and regional interconnections.

In 1823, the U.S. President Monroe, announced the position of the United States with respect to former colonies of Spain and Portugal in South America that had asserted

their independence and proclaimed themselves as new republics. This position, which became known since the 1850s as the Monroe Doctrine, attempted not only to oppose European colonialist efforts to take control of the nascent independent States, but also set a long-lasting benchmark in the foreign policy and spheres of influence of the United States. However, it was not until the late 1880s, with the International American Conference that the doctrine started to push policies of “economic integration” of the Western Hemisphere.

One of the first efforts to “draw the countries more closely together,” as the report of the Second Pan-American Conference held in Mexico stated, was the declaration that a railroad connecting all or most of the nations represented in the Conference “would contribute greatly to the development of trade relations and to the growth of their material interests” (Davis 1907:45-56).

Soon, experts and engineers were assigned surveys to secure railroad communication between the United States and the Argentine Republic. The results were published by authority of Congress and were meant to be utilized by the different governments and companies engaged in railroad building all along Latin America. The chapter specific to Colombia stated: “a valuable part of the vast natural resources of the country are tributary to the Pan-American route and the opportunities for their exploitation should encourage the various projects for building sections of the line” (Davis 1910:9).

But railroads in Colombia were not simply orchestrated by an emergent imperial power that sought to exploit the resources of the region. Before becoming a key node in the efforts of creating a Pan-American network, railroads in the country had a longer and

more localized history. Indeed, following the civil wars at the end of the nineteenth century, a liberal faction called *Independientes*, dissatisfied with popular political upheaval, began to see economic development and infrastructure as a more effective form of control. As it has been argued for the case of the colonial railways in India, they were a bio-moral project designed to distribute people according to their prescribed capacities for labor and reproduction (Bear 2007). In the midst of a growing consensus that identified international trade with “true civilization,” telegraphs, railroads and steamships in Colombia became central concerns for a “regeneration” project.⁶

Although, most elites promoted technological and infrastructural innovations, the ideas enforced by the faction of *Liberalismo Independiente*, inaugurated a new era of governing with jobs and development. A newspaper not fortuitously named *El Ferrocarril*, insisted in 1878 that when people are busy working “no one thinks about politics” (*El Ferrocarril* quoted in Sanders 2000:330). This change, introduced by the region’s “regeneration” project, can be evidence through another local newspaper entitled *El Telégrafo*. Founded by merchants, landowners, entrepreneurs, public works contractors and foreign citizens as Eder, this newspaper sought to redirect Colombia away from the supposed disorder and anarchy, and towards a “stronger” state with less popular political participation. For this newspaper printed in Palmira, the largest producer of exportable goods and the place where most of the commercial export transactions were carried out, local political leaders known as *gamonales* were the ones to blame for the crisis that halted economic development (*El Telégrafo* quoted in Valencia 1988:27). Their clientage networks and their position in society —hacienda owners, public officials, and priests were counted among them— permitted them to exert power over

rural voters, perpetuating their political machinery in power (Fals-Borda 1955). Even those liberals not completely convinced by the repressive stance of the *Regeneración* movement, agreed that once “linked by railroads and telegraphs,” the centers of population in Cauca “will form a large family of brothers and sisters, who will be joined together by the community of social, political, and commercial interests” (Caicedo Caicedo in Valencia 1988:143). Infrastructural improvements supported materially the promises of economic growth and moral progress of the emergent nation.

By 1870s, the “modernizing elite” of the Valley finally managed to improve the route across the western Andes to the Pacific Ocean to level of *camino de rueda* or *carretero* [wheel path] allowing the use of carriages (Neal 1971:161). The operation of this route in the trade of tobacco, bought from black smallholders, and other commodities in boom like indigo, quinine, and coffee gradually allowed elite groups to build large sugarcane plantations in the central parts of the Valley. However, a railroad connecting the port of Buenaventura on the Pacific Coast with these new plantations (distance of 110 miles), had been expected for long by most elites in the province. A writer and poet born in Popayán described the situation reenacting an encounter with a landowner as he crossed the valley around 1850:

Unprofitable riches, among which we live poor! That antithesis, I said, is nothing more but an exaggeration. No, he told me, there’s no reason to exploit this lands, much less with whom to do it. Who could consume what my hacienda can produce? Here, where we have to throw away the molasses before they turn into vinegar, where the maize serves as grass for the weevils, and the fruits fall from the trees because there is no one to harvest them. Here, where the daily wages have to be paid miserably and those who *conciertan*, work one day and loiter a month, where there are no industries that reciprocally help each other, where everyone cultivates what they need for their families, and with that they have their needs satisfied for their lifeless life. But turn the molasses into sugar, pack your corn and freight them all to Buga, Cali [...] And in Buga and Cali they

would remain stored and I will lose production and transportation costs. Products abound, but consumers are missing [...] (Pombo 1866:236, my translation).⁷

In part the author of the simulated encounter attributed the valley's stagnation to a presumed stasis of *Caucano* peasants that worked "one day and loiter a month" and "that had their needs satisfied for their lifeless life." This representation, very attuned to the "social Darwinism" of the time, added to the Cauca's own emerging racialized social order.⁸ But the stagnation was attributed also to the lack of infrastructure for extraction and the lack of imaginings of modernity and progress that these made possible.

Ten years later the road to the Pacific Ocean across the western Cordillera was finally improved. Among the first enterprises to benefit from this dirt road was Santiago Eder's sugarcane mill *La Manuelita* in Palmira. There are records of *masas para trapiche* [masses for the mill] and other equipment being transported by oxen over the Pacific road to build the whole fabric that Eder ordered (custom design) in Glasgow (see Figures 20). It took almost two years, 1200 mules, and 600 oxen to move the whole equipment to the base of the Valley. This will constitute the first centrifuge mill in the region capable of separating sugar crystals from molasses. It will replace his old hydraulic *trapiche* [mill]; a Louisiana mill No. 1 (Rojas 1983:94). Despite these industrious achievements, provisions for a railroad line had to wait until the end of the nineteenth century.

When plans were being made for the Cauca railway, Colombia had already some experience in the matter. Since 1852, there was a steam railroad owned by North American investors, which crossed the Isthmus of Panama, between the ports of Colón (on the Atlantic Ocean) and Panama (on the Pacific). In the Caribbean Sea, since 1871 till

1941 there was also a short track constructed by German engineers that connected the mouth of the Magdalena River, the country's main waterway, with the deeper waters of Sabanilla close to the Cartagena port (Poveda 2002). The railway of Cucuta, inaugurated in 1888, transported coffee originally from the region of the Santanderes till the port Villamizar, on the Zulia River, seeking its exit towards the Lake of Maracaibo in Venezuela.⁹



Figure 20. *masas para trapiche* are being transported by oxen over the Pacific road to build Santiago Eder's *Ingenio La Manuelita* in Palmira. Source: APFFV, Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garces Borrero: s. n. & s. n. (1899) Code: 0400018

With these experience in mind, the Cauca governor Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera—owner of gold mines on the Pacific coast, descendant of wealthy hacienda-owners in Popayán, and four times president of Colombia—, sought ways to develop the region's commercial links with international and internal markets. Mosquera's trading connections with Europe and the United States allowed him to endorse in 1872 a contract for a regional railroad to a company constituted in Illinois by David R. Smith and Frank B. Modica (*The Cauca Valley Mining Constructing Company* 1874). The company pledged to construct and put in public service, within the term of four years, a railroad (30 inches

wide) between the sea-shore in the Bay of Buenaventura and the west bank of the Cauca river.¹⁰ By 1876, the company failed to deliver the railroad, and only after two years the work was resumed but now under the direction of the Cuban engineer Francisco Javier Cisneros, who by that time was also in charged of the constructions of the Antioquia railroad.

In a report written by Cisneros and published in New York, the engineer intended to show that the capital needed for this enterprise would meet a flattering return, due to “the inexhaustible veins of wealth accumulated in the heart” of the country (Cisneros 1978:3). The national government, granted the construction company the privilege of exploitation for fifty years, exemptions from taxes and customs, and two hundred thousand hectares of *tierras baldias* [wasteland] (Pérez 1998). By 1885, the new commission managed to build the Buenaventura-Cordoba section and the Piñal Bridge, which united the port with the continent. In 1890 the North American James Cherry, probably seduced by Cisneros’s campaign, assumed the construction taking the railroad until the site of Sucre, on the river Dagua. Topography, administrative difficulties and again civil wars (conflicts between the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and radical factions) slowed down and finally froze the works till a peace treaty was signed on with North American in 1902.¹¹ Facilitated in part by the monetary compensation that brought the separation of Panama, the railroad finally reached the inter-Andean Cauca valley in 1915 (Pérez 1998). From the city of Cali, it expanded in a few years to the northern and southern borders of the department, reaching the town of Suárez and Santander de Quilichao in northern Cauca around 1920 (see Figure 21).



Figures 21. Above: Pedro A. Riascos (1927). “*El Ferrocarril del Pacífico en uno de aquellos cruces que ponían a rezar al pasajero*” & 501391. Below: s. n. & s. n. (1918). “*Construcción de la vía férrea, en el tramo hacia Santander de Quilichao*” & 103874. Source: APFFV, Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garces Borrero.

Five years later, it managed to connect with the city of Popayán.¹² By this time the Panama Canal also entered in operation interconnecting the whole region precisely in times when the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s, encouraged the domestic production of the goods that previously had to be imported.

With these changes, the geographical Cauca valley, and its capital city, Cali, became more important economically and politically than other subregions of the great Cauca department. Once the railroad interconnected the Pacific coast with Cali, Palmira, Buga, and towns far north, commodities as well as politics, quickly began bypassing Popayán; the old colonial center of power. As a consequence, the emergent entrepreneur elite of the Valley managed to push the national government to create an independent state in 1910.¹³ With the new department, the old Cauca state did not only lost the seaport in the Pacific Ocean and the fertile flatlands surrounding the Cauca River, but also ended up losing *Norte del Cauca* to the economic attraction of the modernization projects in the valley. Towns such as Puerto Tejada, Villarica, Guachené, Caloto, Santander de Quilichao, and Suárez continued administratively and politically attached to Popayán, but the commercial connection with Cali soon tip the scale in favor of the latter. Thus, all these efforts of interconnection gathered together people, commodities, and politics in a very particular kind of economic governance. Yet, they generated as well sensibilities and emotional investments not always easy to predict.

Riding the train, navigating the river

María and her daughter Fernanda have just entered their small coffee bean production to their dark house after letting it drying under the sun for almost 12 days in the country hills of Mindala. “There were no roads, no cars, no buses, just *trochas* [trails],” said

María answering my question about the arrival of the first train to the upper Cauca River. “*El Ferro* was a marvel; with that chimney and that sound. Before, my father had to walk long distances to sell what we grew: plantains, coffee, yucca, maize and cane. Sometimes he even went to Buenos Aires, because the market in Suárez was not what it is today,” she said while sitting in front of the pulped coffee beans, in a small chair carved from a single log.¹⁴ Although Piendamó, to the south, was a better place to sell the coffee, when the train arrived the economic orbits of these black small peasants changed by the gravitational influences of the metropolitan center of Cali. “My father felt like a real *negociante* [merchant] standing in front of that train. Before, he was just a miner and small farmer. But it was the growth of coffee what really attracted his attention at that time,” María said.

Of middle height and with a hunchback posture, María was in her late eighties. But beyond her hearing amplifier set, she looked as strong as one of Bertha’s rocks, who lived a few minutes down the same hill. The train was well established when she was born; nonetheless María admitted that her passion for *El Ferro* came from his father. In 1920, when the first locomotive reached Suárez, he, as many other town inhabitants, always made time for watching the locomotive spin in the *tornamesa* [turntable] that allowed the engine to return all the way back to Cali. After all, many locals felt this iron “marvel” as theirs too. Many residents of the area had worked opening the trails, cutting the trees for the *polines* [wooden railroad ties], extracting grabbles from the river, and later, laying the tracks as the train advanced.

“Seeing that machine was something special, but riding it, that was really fun!” said María, remembering her past journeys along the valley. “Besides the cargo that my

father sold, my mother and I used to take *guayabas* to the market of Santa Helena in Cali. I helped her collect them from trees. Every time it was *el rebusque* [a sort of rummaging for economic opportunities] to see what we could sell,” she commented. The route María described, passed through Asanzú, San Francisco, Timba, Guachinte, Jamundi and finally Cali, but people could also commute to Juanchito or Santander de Quilichao. “I think it was better than now. The Pan-American Highway was not yet completed; therefore Suárez was still a mandatory stop. Now, without the train, we don’t connect with anything. This has become the way to the Salvajina dam, but even so the road is still unpaved and the railroad has been abandoned,” she complained,

Trying to get her back to recalling the experience of riding the train, I asked her about her journeys to Cali: “*Ah si* [Oh yes,], as I was telling you, there were two trains. The one for those who could afford the best seats, we called that *el Ferro*, and there was the train for the rest of us. But I remember the wind and the view of the river. We used to ride in the back, along with the wood, which was carried on Sundays. It was mainly *canelo*, I remember. That was the tree used in the tracks,” she said. *Canelos* are very tall and string trees found in the surrounding mountains. According to People brought a *lomo de bestia* [by horse] all sorts of wood, and that all went to the train. When it came back it carried gasoline. In the meantime my father would go to the farm, or to the *jornal* [one day of wage labour]. There were so many farms producing coffee, that people were always looking for others to help them with la *cosecha* [harvest],” María said (see Figure 22).



Figure 22. In drying tables the pulped and fermented coffee is spread thinly and mixed by hand on raised beds, which allows the air to pass on all sides of the coffee. Photographs by the author.

“When we all came back to the house, we were all tired, my parents sat to drink coffee and eat *pandebono* [corn flour and cassava starch, bread], *como analizando el tiempo* [like analyzing time]. My eldest sister she had to take care of the *fogon* [fire] and I went to collect firewood. We both were in charged of dinner,” she said. Observed there, sifting and cleaning the beans in a dark room shared with turkeys and chickens, María’s tired eyes shined as she remembered these moments. Her family could not have come to this crop in a better time. The completion of the Cauca railroad —connecting the towns with the big cities in the Cauca Valley, the Popayán plateau, and the port in the Pacific Ocean— and the export boom in coffee, since the end of the nineteenth century, generated a stable link between regional and international markets. These commercial links complemented greatly their existing subsistence economies, based on farming, mining, and fishing.

This fructiferous convergence demanded as well, the improvement of commercial abilities and the enhancement of saving and investment practices. María, for instance recalled doubts that her father had, about where to sell their coffee and plantains to get a better price. She mentioned that for a while, he even tried to commercialize the products of others. There was this time when he tried buying small quantities of yucca. But in the end, María recalled with pride, that it was her mother’s saving skills, what enabled them to transform their land occupation into a formal title. Indeed, coffee production and exports, introduced during the first decades of the twentieth century, not only major changes in the economy of landowners and merchants all along the region, but also in the livelihoods and social life of small peasants around the country.

“My husband and I fell in love thanks to the train,” said Fernanda helping out her mother with the beans, and with the exhausting interview. Fernanda was in her late fifties and with her husband Arnoldo, had stayed in the farm after María became a widow. “My husband, before we married, he spent quite some time in Risaralda gathering coffee. There were big farms on those hills and the work was very well paid. Then one day he told me that he was going to be in Cali, and asked me if we could see each other there. As my dad did not like him; my father had already threatened him with the shotgun once. So he told me: ‘*either you stay with your dad, or you stay with me.*’ And I took the train to Cali. Passing through Timba, I put a *ruana* over me so that my two sisters, who were like blades, could not recognize me. I knew they were washings clothes by the river. I was very nervous, but thrilled as well. When we returned, somebody had already informed my parents about our adventure, but my mother was the one who welcomed him and we stayed here,” Fernanda recounted.

Although coffee soon proved to be more successful on temperate slopes, as Fernanda’s husband discovered in Risaralda, the interconnections and flows provided by the railroads and steamships, encouraged its cultivation throughout the entire Cauca region creating new social bonds due to its intense labor requirements during harvest seasons. Even on the valley floor around Santander de Quilichao, and around the Palo and La Paila Rivers, coffee trees prospered between the mid 1920s and early 1930s. Unlike other places where coffee plantation companies were established (e.g. Antioquia or Caldas), cultivation in the northern Cauca did not occurred in large estates or *haciendas cafeteras*, rather it was assumed by smallholders with little technological investment (Ararat et.al. 2013:84-93). In its census of 1932, The National Federation of

Coffee Growers counted the number of smallholdings below 5000 trees in the northern Cauca region: in Buenos Aires 96% (total plantings 364); in Santander 98% (total 561); in Puerto Tejada 93% (total 260); in Caloto 60% (total 685) (FNC 1933:133-134). The Cauca occupied eighth place in national production among thirteen regions.

Steamships in the Cauca River were already operating intermittently since 1883, but it was only with the growing railroad system, that the river passed from supporting three ships in 1915, to fourteen in 1923 (Londoño 2013:184). The integration of both systems, permitted the transfer of cargo from the river to the trains through ports and shipping services created on early colonial river accesses and roads. Along the river, about 20 piers were built offering warehouses, repair workshops, provision of firewood as fuel, as well as loading and unloading of products and passengers (Valencia 2000). Prior to these expansions, scientific commissions had been deployed to survey the river's depths and currents, confirming its navigability from *La Balsa*, at the southern end of the valley, till the rapids in the old Caldas (present day Quindio), at the northern frontier with Antioquia. The first efforts were aimed at connecting precisely those productive coffee zones in Caldas with Yumbo, and then Palmira and Cali, to facilitate the departure of export goods to the seaport in the Pacific Ocean.

The first steamship company to operate in the Valley, was label by the local newspaper *El Ferrocarril* as the “first serious enterprise of the whole Cauca” (*El Ferrocarril* quoted in Londoño 2013:183). There were ships specialized in the transport of cattle (e.g. Santander with a capacity of 46 tons), but most of them, as the *vapor* Mercedes, which moved in each trip 5.600 sacks of coffee traveling five times a month, were dedicated to passengers and agrarian goods (Valencia 2000). When the railroad

system finally reached the northern end of the geographic valley (Cartago and Armenia), and the central motorway (1928) connected the mills with local commercial centers and towns, the importance of *vapores* [steamships] began to fade, until finally disappearing in 1930. Again, as it happened with railroads, in steamship companies, local and foreign businessmen were involved bringing machinery bought in London and imported into the Valley by oxen carts from Buenaventura to Cali.

This changing landscape of infrastructural development seemed to favorably modify perceptions of travelers. Ernst Röthlisberger, the Swizz professor that had described the province in the mid 1880s as “scenery for all passions and place of all barbarism,” had a slightly different opinion when in 1927 he revisited the valley, this time with a functioning railroad:

If we descend now by the slopes of the central mountain range to the Cauca Valley, suddenly in Cartago it opens before us in its maximum amplitude, we find here a very different zone of cultivation [than in Caldas], but equally prosperous. There gigantic farms and *latifundios* about 500, 1000 or more hectares still imprints in the region a particular physiognomy. Along the Pacific railroad, which runs from the port of Buenaventura to Cali, passing through the Cordillera Occidental, and from that capital follows the course of the Cauca to the north in a length of about 200 kilometers, a series of cities has been forming, which regarding vitality and well-being, surpass all the other regions. The inhabitants of the countryside help in the cultivation of large estates as occasional workers. In cities such as Palmira, Buga, Tuluá, Santander [de Quilichao], Bugalagrande among others, industrial companies have emerged giving vitality and profits to the region. The warm climate educates the inhabitants in the cleanliness, and the clear water of the rivers that rush of the mountain ranges towards the Cauca favors their healthy kind of life (Röthlisberger 1993[1929]:435, my translation).

But Röthlisberger still found a problem. No matter how clear the waters were, or how many prosperous towns were formed thanks to the trains, there were things in his view that could not be improved:

If these beautiful fields had not been populated by the *negros* brought by the Spaniards in great numbers, and if because of the unhappy mixture resulting therefrom, there had not been a proletariat so reluctant to civilization, the Valley would have reached the standards of development found in Antioquia and Caldas. But given the current circumstances with time it will hardly be possible to avoid a social conflict with the large landowners, because today the lack of an obedient and willing labor force is definitely felt (Röthlisberger 1993[1929]:435, my translation).

Elites had in fact not yet succeeded to transform the landscape into the paradise they envisioned. The Regeneration's project achieved important infrastructural improvements, but such developments apparently failed both in preventing new civil confrontations and in disciplining the "reluctant proletariat," as Röthlisberger lamented. The Coffee economy proved to be more stable than previous export commodities, allowing not only big players to benefit from it, but also numerous small farmers, including the peasants and miners of the northern Cauca. However, the land question remained unsolved for many. Indeed, pressure on securing large private properties and efforts to deny smallholders persisting land claims augmented by the late 1930s (Taussig 1979: 91, Sanders 2000:394). Large-scale commercialized agriculture, in particular related to sugar industry, was advancing firmly into the region providing new ways of attracting foreign capital, and new ways of shielding property rights, while transforming the landscape with expert and technical knowledge. After all, by the 1950's the region's rural problems are going to be linked to the perceived lack of protection against floods and the lack of an agricultural middle class, both problems would demand engineering on a new scale.

A Tennessee Valley Authority for the Cauca River

Not long after my first encounter with María, I accompanied her to Suárez to buy a new set of batteries for her hearing amplifiers, which were fading. We could not find the

proper model in any pharmacy, but I promised her to bring some from Cali on my next visit. On our way back to her house, passing along the narrow top of the Salvajina dam, constructed by regional elites between 1979 and 1985, we picked up on the road an old acquaintance of her. From this vantage point of view, I could see the angled concrete wall of the dam half exposed due to a prolonged dry season. With a depth of hundred and fifty meters, the water level was forty meters below its full capacity. Habituated to my conversations about the history of past railways and steamboats, about the life worlds that such systems sustain, amplify, or destroy, María suggested me to ask our fellow passenger about how the relationships with River were before the reservoir and dam: “Don Florentino knows more about that history than I do, his father was a *balsero* [rafter], right?” asked María looking at his neighbor.

Holding a white polyester sack with rice, cooking oil, and salt, Don Florentino smiled at me through the rearview mirror: “He was more of a miner, but yes.” Seventy-six years old, dressed with black rubber boots, gray hardwearing trousers, and white long sleeve shirt and hat, Don Florentino remained almost completely silent for the rest of the trip.¹⁵ He nodded here and there, but didn’t pronounce more than two words. After all we didn’t know each other, and to gain his confidence I would have to do something more than give him a ride. I only learned that it took him about three hours walking from the town of Suárez to his farm in one of the hills of Mindala. He had sisters living there, but only visited the town on Sundays to buy *la remesa* [staple food] in the market. When we stopped at a bend in the road, where the clayey steep path toward his house was now visible, he thanked us for the ride and surprisingly agreed to recount some stories he knew, if I would come visit him tomorrow afternoon: “Take this *desecho* [trail] and don’t

stop till you see a wooden hose with flowers everywhere,” he said as he got out of the car with the white sack on his shoulder.

Don Florentino’s house was situated at a high point over the twenty-three kilometer-wide reservoir. Besides the flowers, three signs welcomed the visitor: *hay helados a \$500* [there are ice creams at 500 pesos]; *Si hay huevos* [yes there are eggs]; *hoy no fío, mañana si* [Today I don’t give credit, tomorrow yes]. Don Florentino asked me to wait while he prepared some lemonade; he knew that climbing the hill was a demanding physical activity for a city dweller like me. Then we sat to chat on his porch: “As many others around here, I used to live by the river,” he said offering me a refill of lemonade, “In those days, if you were to visit me, you wouldn’t have had to walk that much nor climb as you did today,” he said. “But then I would have needed a canoe instead,” I commented playfully in an attempt to bring the river into focus. “Well, not exactly,” he answered. “Before the dam, there were no roads till here, but there were trails that followed the river, and believe me, they were shorter than the one you took today. On those days, it only took me 30 minutes from Suárez,” Don Florentino remarked. “Then, with the dam and lake, people ended up being trapped, the trails were lost and it took them quite some time to find a way out again. Now people use the *planchón* provided by EPSA [the energy company that runs the dam], but that is restricted to certain schedules and stops,” he added taking his hat off to air his head. “By the way Don Florentino, tell me about the navigation on the river before the dam?” I solicited.

“You see, it was relatively easy to go down stream, but coming back it was another story; it took almost triple the time. My father used to tell me that with the *balsas*

[bamboo raft] they went all the way down till Juanchito in Cali. They gathered bamboo around the mouth of the Inguító River and constructed large rafts,” said Florentino standing up to show me how rafts were maneuvered using a long lever. That was approximately an 80-kilometer travel through one of the most twisting sections of the river. Depending on the state of the currents, this could mean a journey from eight to fourteen hours. But despite these risks and inconveniences, *balsas* or *champanes*, as these rafts were also known, were central figures in the sense of place before the construction of the dam. In fact, as we will see in this section, there was a world of difference between the experience of those for whom the river was ‘a way of life,’ and the perspective of a corporation and an agricultural elite that was about to see its waters and gorges only as a power resource.

The French engineer Jorge Brisson, in his explorations in search of resources for exploitation between the years 1891 or 1897, offers an interesting description of the encounter between artisan rafts and steamships:

[...] The river is very meandering, and we continually make curves and snakes, often very short and small, but the pilot evolves with dexterity, he describes continuous arcs of a circle with a resourcefulness and skill worthy of praise. [...] [The ship stops at] tiny harbors formed by one or two little houses [...]. We often find large *guadua* rafts that carry goods: cocoa, coffee, hides, etc., or import articles for the interior traders. [...] these rafts are driven by *bogas*, which to direct the boat, use long levers of *guadua* against the riverbanks or the bottom of the river. These rafts are provided in the middle of a ranch or roof made out of *caña brava*. These rafts go down almost as fast as steamboats, but they use triple or quadruple time up the river (Brisson in Londoño 2013:186-187, my translation).

“But it was not necessary to fight against the current coming up the river again,” clarified Don Florentino, “most of the times, people sold the whole raft in Cali, if not before. It was better to come back with the train avoiding any danger,” he said. “What kind of

dangers?" I asked. "There were rapids here close to La Balsa and close to the mouth of El Palo, currents that rushed into whirlpools and swirls. The river is like a serpent before reaching Cali," hand gestures and body movements saturated Florention's words as he continued: "I believe that at least two steamships disappeared in those whirlpools in a matter of seconds! *Ay*, the thing is that this river was *desenfrenado* [rampant], *en invierno eso se regaba por todos lados* [in rainy season it overflowed everywhere]. But those were the places where people lived, since the rest was just *hacienda* lands, it was the river the only one that granted us spaces for living. If that river could talk, he would talk for me," he concluded now with certain nostalgia when looking below at the dam's concrete wall.

Florentino's words resonated with accounts of colonial and post-independence times, when those floodable areas were indeed more socially than economically valued by landowners (Colmenares 1983:26). In his *Travels through the interior provinces of Colombia* around the mid-1820, Colonel J. P. Hamilton describes on his way to Japio the "swamps and morasses, in which our poor mules were up to their knees at almost every step" (Hamilton 1827:116). In similar ways, Pombo the same Colombian poet that voiced an *hacendado's* claim about the lack of commerce and labor force, remarked the difficulty of terrain conditions:

With the mud up to the neck we arrived at the Cauca River, where the mosquitoes gave us music and stings for more than two hours, which we spent in softening the heart of the most forbidding and unhappy man recorded in the annals of the working man (...) Because of the large amount of sand that the Cauca carries and which, having accumulated, raises the river bed, it seems that it does not keep the proper leveling with the valley; So it is overflowing on its banks and dam all its tributaries. From here the marshes that make their banks deadly and the great floods that compel their tributaries in almost all their length (Pombo 1856: 237, my translation).¹⁶

In 1876 two European explorers traveling from Cali to Popayán (see Figure 23), described also the swamp lands of the valley as a “damn quagmire:”

Difficult to find the ford; but observing the vegetation, I was able to recognize the banks of the river by the *ingas*, *sagitarias*, *ginesias*, *diefanbaquias* and *heliconias* that grown forming a dense group of bushes. On the other hand, the way on the right margin of the Cauca River coming from Zelandia crosses the Jamundi River near the Paso of *Sifiente* by an elegant bridge that we discovered in the middle of a twenty meters high leafy thicket of bamboo. Its flexible branches were studded with large colored monkeys watching us familiarly, ten steps away, making grimaces and contortions (Wiener, et al. 1884:714-717).¹⁷

In a letter published in the *National Agriculture Magazine* in 1906 a prosperous landowner, and later founder of an industrial sugarcane mill, denounced what he perceived as the most difficult situation of local agriculture:

Between us, in our splendid Cauca valley, agriculture is defeated. Painful is this confession, but not less true. It is not sown except in Pará, and every year large sums are invested by overthrowing forests and drying swamps and marshes to found pastures. The cause, in my opinion, is just, and before charging, we should hear the reasons (Caicedo en Sánchez y Santos 2014:204-205 my translation).

Undoubtedly, native groups and later enslaved people and *libertos* didn't see things the same way. Before the Spaniards' intrusion, when the river was in flood, channels opened in the extensive shallow depressions, took advantage of water flows providing irrigation for corn, yucca and large fruit trees, as well as fishing spots and irrigation during the dry season (Crist 1952:3-5, Almario 2013:32-35). By the eighteenth century, runaway slaves and *libertos* were successful too in occupying these spaces in the shores of the Cauca and its tributaries, learning to read the rising water levels and meander formations not always as a risk, but also as an opportunity that brought farming, mining and fishing prospects (see Chapter 2). Where natives and former slaves saw

diverse modes of subsistence, landowners lacking labor force and tropical agricultural skills, only imagined grasses for their cattle.

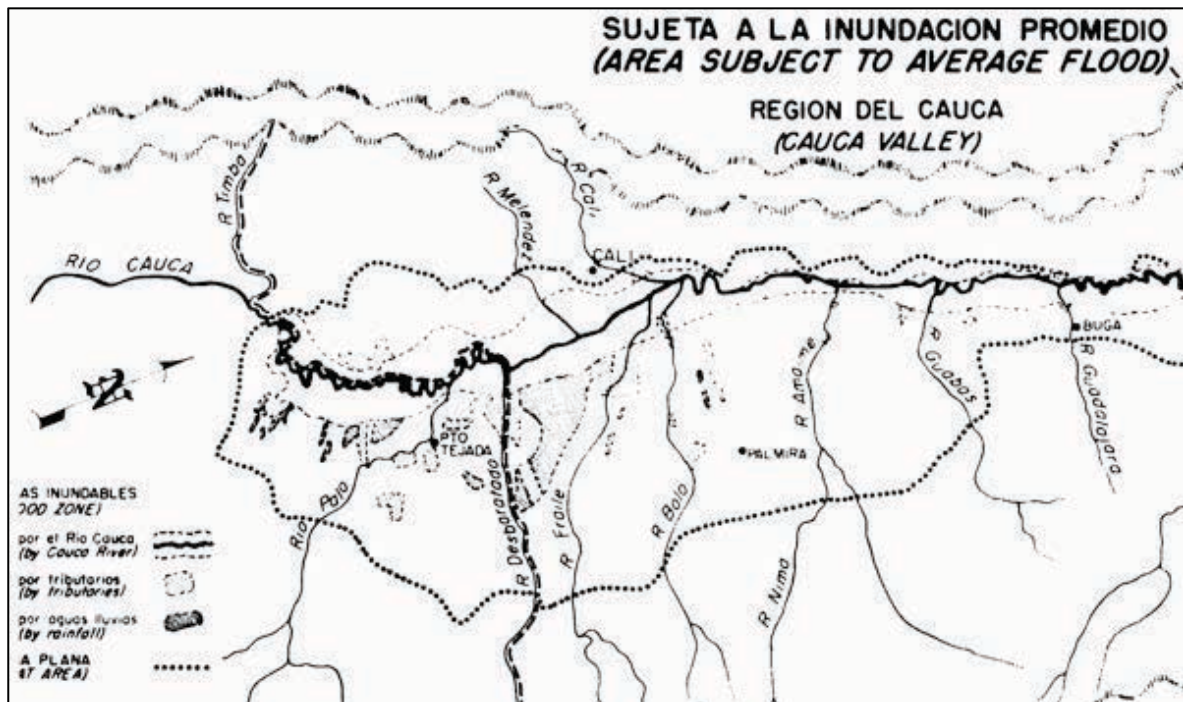
Having to cope in 1910 with this floodable areas of the valley Frank M. Chapman, ornithologist of the American Museum of Natural History, suspected that at least once in geological time part of the floor of the Cauca Valley was an ancient lake whose waters at last worked their way northwards (Chapman 1917:127). More contemporary observers have coincided with this interpretation, adding that this ancient lake and the present flooding could explain in part the fertility and quality of the soils of the valley (Guhl 1975:36-37). But as a report by the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* would suggest in 1955, in order to foster economic development a flood protection system ought to be implemented soon (Larsen et al. 1955) (see Map 11).

Listening to Don Florentino say that the river had been the only one that granted people spaces for living, I incited him to explain in detail his perception of this relationship against the view of those who changed its movement and growth with concrete and dikes: “Tell me more about the River. What would the river say if it could speak?” I asked. “Well, the most terrible memories are related to this dam and lake,” he said. “Make no mistake, my grandchildren love the lake, they like to ride the *planchón* [ferryboat] to school every morning, but they can not imagine the things we did in that river before the dam,” he said as he snorted. “It was the source of our work, now we have to suffer the consequences. There is a lot of gold buried in there, and the weather changed with the lake too. The cold breeze, which rises in the mornings from the lake, freezes everything: plantains, yucca, maize, beans, avocado trees, citric trees and even the coffee plants. If you come tomorrow morning you are going to see that the cooking oil I bought

today, will be completely solidified, the salt will be melted and the *panela* [raw sugar blocks] too,” said Don Florentino pointing at the sack he was carrying in the car.

“But what I miss the most is the fun we had in the river as we were kids, *hmmm*. That was something. I used to bathe almost five times a day, and my cousins; I remember, when they were washing clothes, they use to tell me: *you are going to turn into a fish*. When I was about sixteen I loved to fish, that I remember. I spend the whole day in the river. At that time I learned to build the rafts too, but they were not always made of *guadua*, you could also use *cachimbos* and other big trees,” he said.

“My first raft was made out of *vastagos de banana* [burgeon plantains]. I tied them with a rubbish creeper and then I made a *canalete* [paddle] with a small tree, and ventured into the water,” Florentino said in a way that presaged a disaster. “Where you intending to cross the river? What were you doing?” I asked. Between laughs he continued: “Yes, I was looking for a gold mine in the other side. I was with a friend, but we didn’t find anything. And coming back we almost drown, the creeper didn’t hold and we lost *el pico, el martillo y la muela* [pike, hammer and chisel] that we had to work with. That day I decided to properly learn how to build rafts,” he concluded again laughing. “Now you barley see any boats in the river. What are you suppose to do when you reach that wall? To undo the raft and carry everything down the hill and then put it back together?” he said.



Map 11 and Figure 23. In the map above, from the IBRD report (Larsen 1955), different areas subject to floods by rainfall and rivers are identified along the margins of the Cauca River and its tributaries. The total area subject to flood was approximately 84,000 hectares; almost 20% of the total plain area of the valley. Below a drawing from the travel book *America Pintoresca* (1884:716) named “*Los pantanos de Cañitas*,” near the Jamundi River in the Cauca Valley.



Figure 24. Above, the meandering sections of the Cauca River before the construction of the flood control system and the Salvajina dam and lake.1966. 25X18. Part of the APFFV. Below, Typical rural house at the edge of one of the rivers of the region. Source: Moll Gonzalez (1960). & 400062. PALMIRA Source: Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garces Borrero.

In the same years that Don Florentino was enjoying his days by the river and was learning the craft of canoes and rafts, an autonomous regional entity (CVC) dedicated to promote flood control, electric power and development of natural resources was being created upon the collaboration between regional elites, the Rockefeller Foundation and Tennessee Valley Authority executives (see Map 12). Constituted on October 22 of 1954, by Decree Law, during the epoch of the military dictatorship, the CVC brought to life a new geologic force that would change the landscape of the valley completely. The list of issues “rendered technical” by the CVC included irrigation, agricultural activities, crops modification, transportation, and minerals. It also attempted with the construction of dams and dikes, to the “recovery” of almost 5,000 hectares subject to floods in the outskirts of Cali, which ultimately could be devoted to developing housing projects for the lower classes. Satirizing the name of one of the three hydroelectric dams that were built by the Corporation, Don Florentino called this era *La Salvajada* [the savagery] (see Figure 25).¹⁸

Since the second half of the twentieth-century, the Cauca River valley experienced rapid economic change directed mainly by a heavily capitalized sugarcane industry, and the institutionalization of “development” plans with foreign expert assistance and funding. The basis for an official development program for Colombia goes back to the constitutional reform of 1945. With the support from the World Bank, the governing document “introduced for the first time the notion of planning” and established a series of units and ministers for accomplishing this mission (Escobar 2012[1995]:187). Among the institutions created after this reform, the most important for the capitalist

transformation of the valley was the *Autonomous Regional Development Corporation of the Cauca Valley* (CVC).



Map 12 and Figure 25. Above design of the expansion plans of the TVA's model of "valley resource development." Source: TVA 1961:ix, Rockefeller Archive. Below, Photograph of the board of directors of the CVC visiting the construction project of the Salvajina dam in Suárez, northern Cauca circa 1984. Source: CVC archive.

The idea of an *Autonomous Regional Development Corporation* was not new. This was, after all, a “Tennessee Valley Authority for Colombia,” as the *New York Times* labeled the project on November 21, 1954. Described as “a challenge to underdevelopment and traditionalism,” in a study sponsored by the Land Tenure Center of the University of Wisconsin, the *Corporation of the Cauca Valley* (CVC) was among the first entities outside the United States to adopt the TVA model of integrated watershed management and development (Posada and Posada 1966). As stated in a Report of the Select Committee on National Water Resources, in 1961, for the U.S. administration of the time, the development of knowledge around water resources served as a strategic instrument of foreign policy:

[...] through the wide ranging activities of our Federal agencies and our private consulting firms, which have exported American technological discoveries in the water resources field to the far corners of the earth. Our Tennessee Valley Authority has attracted widespread public interest as an example of what could be done in the direction of integrated development of water resources. If we wish to maintain the favored position we have had in international relationships, we may profit from an examination of ways in which the more advanced water resources techniques not only can enable us to meet our own needs but can be made available abroad as important instruments of our foreign policy [...] (TVA 1961:xi).

Two months after its creation, the brand new Board of Directors of the Corporation was already heading to the United States to visit TVA’s experience and get a “first-hand inspection of accomplishments they hoped to emulate in Colombia” (TVA 1961:26). At the same time, the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* was carrying out a mission for the Upper Cauca at the request of the Government of Colombia and of the new Autonomous Regional Corporation (Larsen 1955). The purpose of the mission was to make recommendations about the role, which the newly established Corporation could play to foster economic development at a regional level and from there

on to a national scale. Since then, nearly 600 senior engineering students from Colombia's Universities traveled to the Tennessee Valley during a period of ten years thrilled for participating in what the TVA described as an experimental demonstration and training program "first of its kind in South America," which may bring development to other areas of Colombia, and perhaps to the rest of Latin America too (TVA 1961:25-26).

Amidst accelerating regional infrastructural expansion and urbanization, the rural society and the region's agriculture were said to be "in debts of modernization." This stance predominantly taken by merchants and landlords seeking to join national and international markets, found opposition from an established landed class (particularly the cattlemen) who interpreted the *Corporation* as an instrument of the urban-industrial class to force innovation on a traditional local elite:

[For some] groups, the electrification program constituted an unrealistic and unnecessary program [...] the production and distribution of electric power within a unified regional system was for them an almost incomprehensible matter. The policy of 'laissez-faire, laissez-passer' should not, according to them, be modified in any way, and least of all with the introduction of 'authoritarian' planning notions [...] For them institutions of this kind constituted 'authoritarian organizations incrustated upon the State, removed from the vigilance of public agencies, inaccessible to fiscal control by its contributors, and immune to criticism.' [...] [In short] the CVC was an entity of 'foreign creation' whose functioning should not be permitted unless every step was confirmed by a legislative body, in this case, Congress (Posada and Posada 1966:65-69).

However, instead of simply originating from the "development apparatus" that came with the U.S. hegemony in world capitalist system after 1945, or simply emerging from a centralizing State seeking governmental power, as some scholars have suggested, *The Corporation* was shaped by a more complex interaction.¹⁹ Following the experience of railroads and steamship companies, the conception of the CVC grew out of the initiatives

of local industrialist and agricultural entrepreneurs, which coproduce the discourse of development by incorporating the opportunities of short-term external assistance and foreign funding to expand and deepen the market for their products abroad. As I will show in the next section, as early as 1920s regional elites sought options to attack both, the excessive State power, and what they perceived as the causes of the region's agricultural problems.

Scientific agriculture and Land Tenure

Real estate taxes established as contribution for the CVC, and the element of “planned development” represented strong sources of apprehension among detractors of these flood control programs. However, since 1920s, demands for national government “scientific agriculture” development plans led by landowners, shippers, merchants and politicians from the Cauca River Valley Department, had already made a local problem a State concern. Since 1926 the national government had issued a Law for the “Promotion of Agriculture and Immigration” that would resonate later with CVC's effort to accelerate regional development (Valencia and Carmona 2015:283-84). Besides, confirming that for most elites, supplanting entire populations in a social Darwinist fashion could solve most of the country's problems, the Law promoting agriculture stated that:

The Government will proceed to found three national experimental stations, as close as possible to the capital of the Republic and corresponding to the cold, warm and temperate zones” (Quoted in Valencia and Carmona 2015:283-284).

As a result the first *Agricultural Experimental Station* was created in the city of Palmira, northeast of Cali in 1928. Driven by a conservative Party member, Ciro Molina

Garcés, who eventually would serve as the Colombian Consul in Los Angeles in the 1920s. The *Station* began preparing their staff, sending agricultural engineers to the United States and receiving advice from British consultants that recommended the planting of cotton. The intention was to prepare the technological transfers that would finally allow the “scientific exploitation of the soil.” After cotton failed due to a plague of local pink worms the Station in Palmira welcomed a Puerto Rican Agricultural Mission, commanded by Carlos E. Chardón from Cornell University (Rojas 1983:21). Hired by local government officials, the Mission Chardón, as it became known, strengthened the work of the Station, concentrating efforts in disseminating new and more resistant varieties of crops (especially sugarcane), as well as helping breeding new species of livestock (Valencia and Carmona 2015).

For the first decade of the twentieth century almost half of the surface of the geographical Cauca valley was woods, marshes, and forested areas, the rest was divided between pastures for cattle and different crops such as rice, tobacco, cacao and sugarcane (most of it devoted to non refined blocks of sugar or *panela*). By this time, Santiago Eder in his *Hacienda La Manuelita* had already changed his hydraulic mill for a modern centrifuge powered by steam and complement with towers for the sulfation process, filter press, boilers and evaporators (Manuelita 1964). This allowed *La Manuelita* to improve the extraction of cane juice and the separation of the sugar crystals from molasses, venturing finally into the market of refined sugar. By 1910, the production of the mill passed from 5 to 20 tons of refined sugar a day, utilizing between 350 and 400 laborers. The carts pushed by oxen had been replaced by gasoline locomotives that transported the cane from the fields to the factory. By 1918 *Manuelita* had 13 km of rails, 60 railroad

cars, and three portable cranes for the transshipment of the cane from the wagons to the railroad and from there to the factory (Rojas 1983:61). Between 1927 and 1929, the *hacienda* architecture gives way to a metal structure, incorporating many more elements driven by electric power generated by steam turbines, therefore increasing the milling capacity from 200 to 500 tons of cane a day. The factory utilized approximately 600 workers installed now in houses and camps built by the mill (Rojas 1983:62-63).

But *La Manuelita* was an exception; most cane farms and *haciendas* at the time were still small *trapiches* that had not given the proper technological steps towards centrifugal mills, or to “scientific agriculture.” Only after 1928 the *Ingenios Providencia* and *Riopalia* approached its standards. Finally, with the coming of the *Palmira experimental Station* and the *Puerto Rican Agricultural Mission Chardón*, both the predominance of cattle ranches in the landscape of the valley, as well as the agricultural techniques and technologies experienced a dramatic change. Carlos Chardón, in his report published in Puerto Rico in 1930 and presented to the Governor of the Department, stated that the industry required a “complete revolution in its organization and methods” (Chardón 1930:38).²⁰ According to the report compiled as “*Reconocimiento agropecuario del Valle del Cauca*,” in sugarcane plantations serious improvements in irrigation systems were needed, as well as corrections in the distance between plants and between furrows, which were reported to be too wide and therefore exploiting the soil below its potential use. The depth and shape of the plots were also inspected detecting shallow plowing and inefficient weeding. In addition, the report established that the cane variety that was being used, the *Otahiti*, would soon begin to weaken, recommending the *Palmira* experimental station to import the so-called “miracle cane” of high productivity

and resistant to diseases and plagues (Urrea and Mejia 1999:29). In the end the Mission predicted that only those who face these challenges would survive the competition: “These circumstances will result in large mills taking full ownership of the internal market and small farmers being forced to join to set up mills, or have to withdraw gradually from the business” (Chardón 1930:38). Regarding coffee the Mission found with surprise the lack of nurseries and seedbeds, which by the time were used extensively and with great results in the Antioquia region. New livestock species, improved grasses, and methods of breeding were also encouraged by the report.

During the Second World War, when the United States for instance turned its attention to Latin America, the lidding work of the *Palmira Agricultural Experiment Station* served as inspiration for the Rockefeller Foundation’s agricultural efforts in Mexico (Cotter 1994). In their exploratory search for establishing agricultural programs in Latin America, the Rockefeller Foundation gathered information about the well-established work conducted in Palmira which in turn ended up circling back when the Foundation began providing key support to the Station and the Valley provisioning appropriations for a *Colombian Agricultural Program* (CAP) made effective in December 1949 (Lorek 2013:291). Since that year, the Rockefeller Foundation set the objective to coordinate the plans and methods of existing stations at Aracataca (Magdalena), Armero (Tolima), Medellin (Antioquia), and Palmira (Valle), stressing scientifically oriented research on plants and animals and training programs directed to agronomists who could lead the agricultural development of Colombia (RAC Record Group 6.13, Series 1.1, Box 10, Folder, 118).

CUANDO UD ERA NIÑO

SU PRIMER ALIMENTO FUE...



AZUCAR

La Compañía Distribuidora de Azúcares ha reducido los precios en todo el país. El azúcar es hoy día el alimento completo más barato.

AHORA USTED HACE IGUAL CON SUS HIJOS, Y LO HACE USTED MISMO, Y LO HACEN TODOS: EL AZUCAR ES INDISPENSABLE PARA EL ORGANISMO DE GRANDES Y CHICOS.

AZUCAR: ALIMENTO PARA TODAS LAS EDADES

Figure 26. Advertisement designed by the *Compañía distribuidora de Azúcar* to increase the consumption of Sugar: “When you were kid, your first nourishment was sugar. Now you should do the same with your sons, and you do it by yourself, and everybody does: Sugar is indispensable for the organism of small ones and grownups. The *Compañía distribuidora de Azúcar* has lowered the prices in the whole country. Sugar is nowadays the most complete food and the cheapest.” Source: *Revista Nacional de Agricultura* (July ,1938), 34(408). in Sánchez y Santos 2013:224.

Along with the improvement of existing facilities, the RF contributed till 1969 to the establishment of other eight experiment stations, representing a wide range of climates and topography working collaboratively in the development of high-yield, pest-resistant varieties and hybrids of rice, corn, beans, yucca, wheat, potatoes, and barley (RAC Record Group 1.2, Series 311, Box 86, Folder, 815).

From the point of view of the CAP program director, Lewis M. Roberts, Colombia's inequitable land distribution seemed not be a problem, but an advantage:

Colombia is today in its land tenure systems somewhat in the same situation, I believe, that Mexico was before the revolution. That is, the expanses of level land and fertile land is [sic] held in rather large holdings, many times by absentee landowners [mostly Whitened elites]. And those people in general are well educated, with capital, and once you sell them an idea, they can grasp it. Once they are sold on it, they are willing to go ahead and do something with that idea. In other words, we do not have the high percentage of small farmer [sic] who is poorly educated and lacking in capital and where [sic] to do a job [and] even though he [knows] the job must be done, it will take him a long time to do it (RAC Record Group 1.2, Series 311, Box 2, Folder 7)

Whether shaped domestically or imported from abroad agricultural development in the Valley eventually would transform some of the old and small *Trapiches* into vast *Ingenios*. Not fortuitously the name *Ingenio* [ingenious], as industrial sugarcane mills are known in most Spanish speaking countries, exalted the qualities of being inventive, creative, and clever. At the time these agricultural technologies were being implemented the sugar production in Colombia was about 6236 tons. Fourteen years later the Ministry of the National Economy reported that it was no longer necessary to import sugar. At the new rate of production the state officials estimated that by 1945 Colombia would reach 60,000 tons in round numbers (Sánchez y Santos 2013:205) (see Figure 26).

Downstream from my encounter with Don Florentino, about 26 kilometers after the concrete wall of the dam, there was a lonely sign at an intersection close to Santander de Quilichao. Located in the Pan-American Highway, described by President Nixon in 1971 as “a symbol of New World unity as well as an avenue of commerce and culture,” the sign had a logo with a green leaf growing out of a world map divided by hemispheres. The sign said, “CIAT Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical [The International Center for Tropical Agriculture], 6 Km.”

Founded as one of the spearheads for the agricultural development that came to be known as the “Green Revolution” in 1960s, CIAT became part of a global network of agricultural research centers opened with Rockefeller, Ford, and Kellogg Foundation support. The first two centers were opened in Philippines (1960) and Mexico (1966). In Colombia, CIAT’s headquarters were located in Bogotá, but its first ground facility was opened in Palmira replacing in 1967 the pioneer *experiment Station*. This transition meant an expansion of the previous local scope of the *Palmira Station* to new concerns about “world hunger” (CIAT 1969). Later, in 1977, a second station was open, this time in *Norte del Cauca*, 8 kilometers from the town of Santander de Quilichao.

Heading to interview Gloria, a seventy-year-old peasant woman who lived at the end of CIAT’s Quilichao station, I found again the usual combination of infrastructures and landscapes. Here, as happened near the *veredas* and towns around the Palo River, metalized industrial areas, scorched fields of sugarcane, and *haciendas* conformed a sort of holy trinity; three distinct elements, yet in the eyes of smallholders operating as one single “substance, essence or nature.” After crossing the fields in a straight line, the gravel road narrowed and turned curvy entering a rolling land of wooded hills. Hiding

under the shadow of bamboos, mangoes, acacias, guava and citric trees, Gloria's house appeared as an enchanted plot of fertile land.

"They said that their intention was to complement the work in Palmira with experiments on acids soils, but they are the ones who turned this into bad soils in the first place," said Gloria after I inquire her about the experiment station. "Our farms are lungs, we are doing the conservation work for the government and nobody is paying us for that. In the cane fields, they light *candela* [fire] to all, killing everything." Her oldest son had worked years ago at the CIAT station as a handyman helping with forages and irrigations systems. It was only a temporal work, but he learned enough to explain his mother about "super seeds" and "acid soils," she said.

"I don't know why they promote those seeds, and keep the soil as it is: poor. They should focus on the soil. Besides, those seeds demand higher amounts of fertilizers and water. It seems to me that they are doing all that work not for helping small farmers here," added Gloria fixing her flowery cotton kerchief, "all those experiments are for other regions." As the CIAT's initial mission statement read, the Center was, indeed, not designed to alleviate the growing conflicts of local small farmers. On the contrary, it focused on urban concerns and the "welfare of the people of the world:"

The mission of the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) is to accelerate agricultural and economic development and to increase agricultural production and productivity in order to improve the diets and welfare of the people of the world. In addition, CIAT is concerned with the increase of buying power of urban residents in the sense that they may be able to purchase more and thus benefit from the increased food supplies (CIAT 1969:5).

The same year that the Santander de Quilichao Station was opened in northern Cauca, Peter R. Jennings, who had previously developed the "high-yielding" rice variety

(IR8) that started the green revolution in Filipinas and India, and was using Colombia as a door for expanding it into Latin America, published a paper with James H. Cock on the origins of crop and their productivity (Jennings and Cock 1977). The paper sustained that crops performed better outside their center of origin. Therefore, providing the basis for developing in the northern Cauca Station seeds varieties for Africa and Asia. According to CIATs documents, climatic conditions (altitude, temperature and relative humidity), and the acidity of the soil around Santander de Quilichao, made the station an excellent laboratory for developing seeds for other agricultural regions of the world with high presence of aluminum and low phosphorus (CIAT 2003:2). Being a key center in the research and spread of genetic crossing and hybridization of beans, cassava, corn, rice, and even livestock from Latin America to the rest of the world, CIAT became the pinnacle of scientific agriculture projects in the country and catapulted the region in its aspirations for global interconnections.

In the eyes of smallholder farmers like Gloria, however, CIAT along with other institutions as the CVC, contributed not to the improvement of their land and crops, but to increase the disparities among wealthy and subsistence farmers. Indeed, their mission almost ensured that with “super seeds” there would be no need to solve the land tenure problems of the country (see Figure 27).

“I was born in San Antonio, then my family lived for a while in Santander de Quilichao, before I moved here to teach in the local school. When the Station arrived, in 1977, I had already married and then decided to stay.” Gloria added. “At that time my husband lived almost by the Cauca River. The dam was not yet built, so the Cauca down here was still running free. Most people, including my husband, worked for the *hacienda*

San Julián, living in *barracas* [barracks] as slaves did. Then my husband and his brothers were able to buy small plots in this hill,” Gloria said, giving me a tour around her property.

“Look, “my mother in law planted that mango tree over there to mark their plot; it has more than hundred years, I guess. There was good fishing and lots of fruit trees: *mamoncillo*, *guanabano*, *naranjos*, cacao and some coffee too,” she continued saying while pointing with a stick at each different tree. “Then a pest arrived and affected the coffee, I don’t remember if it was *La Roya* or *La Broca*,²¹ but all the beans turned yellow and most people had to cut their plants,” she argued covering the soil around a small plant with fallen leaves. “I remember that, as the station began working with forages for cattle and spots of yucca, rice and beans, some people turned to that too, as an alternative. But nobody asked us what we knew about growing in these soils, or what our problems were,” she said.

“Now, I mostly see sugarcane, which has become really bad for our animals and crops. Especially, because we had lots of *naranjos* [orange trees] here, but they began spraying and fumigating with small aircrafts, damaging the trees,” Gloria said. “I don’t know exactly where they came from, but my son [who works for them] told me that those pesticides and herbicides are expensive.” Her son usually complained to her that he sprayed in a week more than what he earned in the whole month. She also remembered that when he used those chemical he felt his lungs like closing, as if he had asthma. “I always gave him homemade honey, which helped him relieve the pain,” she said.



Figure 27. Above, CIAT's intersection in the Pan-American Highway near Santander de Quilichao in northern Cauca. Below, Gloria's hill and farm. Photographs by the author.

Downstream, near towns such as Villarica, agricultural development subjected inhabitants with extra-economic pressures that often included violence: “I have heard that in the flat plains along the Palo River the cane industry flooded plots and cut down *guaduales* [bamboo groves] pushing people into towns. But here, we were lucky to keep this undulating land,” she concluded. A sort of “friction of terrain” (Scott 2009) may have saved Gloria’s farm, but “scientific agriculture” came not without technocratic advice on the definition of property rights.²² Since the Chardón Mission stated in 1930s, that the economic future of the region would depend on the expansion and technification of sugarcane plantations, owners of emerging industrial sugarcane mills tackled not only on the lands of old *haciendas*, but also fixed their eyes on the edges where peasant families and tenants like Gloria were settled.

According to historian Catherin LeGrand, most of the great estates that existed in Colombia prior to *La Violencia* of the 1950s, “did not take form in the colonial period: rather they were carved from public lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the impulse of the agricultural export economy” (LeGrand 1989:10). Therefore, with the agrarian conflicts of the time it was still possible for large landowners to lose their estates in the long term due to probable state expropriation (Rojas 1983). Law 200 of 1936, generally known as the *Ley de tierras* [Land Law] attempted to solve these issues by designing the first modern agrarian reform in Colombian history.²³

Despite responding positively in some frontier regions to settler’s attempts to legitimize land occupations through demonstrating improvements in the productivity of their plots, in the Valley, the Law subjected most squatting farmers to further hardships at the hands of landlords. This contradiction arose from an internal conflict within the

Liberal administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938), which vacillated between supporting peasants and settlers who put land to productive use and actively sought to participate in national and international markets, or supporting large landowners whose property claims were not only based on written titles but also were (specially in some regions as the Cauca Valley) becoming champions of agricultural development. Pumarejo's message to Congress upon presenting the Law exemplified the predisposition of the Government:

We have reached a moment of economic development in Colombia in which we have the chance to decide on a universal issue of immediate application in the country. As our current institutions provides, the great landowner, the largest landowner, is the State, and land ownership lacks in the vast majority of cases a perfect title. In the light of abstract jurisprudence, this situation may cause that those properties may revert to the state in case of subjected to court inspection. Technically, then, we are faced with the legal alternative of defining the Nation towards a socialist orientation, or of revalidating private property titles, purifying them of imperfections. The Government's approach has adopted the latter route. The project of the land reform has no other purpose than to legitimize property, organizing it on principles of justice, and resolving the conflicts that have given rise to the litigious vagueness of the existing titles (Pumarejo in López Caballero 2013, my translation).

Moreover, during his Liberal administration, which slogan was, *Revolución en Marcha* [Revolution in progress], several union leaders and counterhegemonic groups were in some ways neutralized by being offered governmental positions and autonomy within the restructured education system (Fals-Borda 1969, Arocha 1980).²⁴ The Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda was on point, arguing that this was the mechanism through which elites succeeded to abort a great socialist transformation (Fals-Borda en Arocha 1980:51).

Thus, during the 1920s and early 1930s, the owners of sugarcane *haciendas* and cattle ranches in the valley sought to ratify the limits and extent of their lands through

demonstrating their interests in intensive exploitation of the soil, reinforced this time by the new predicaments of “scientific agriculture.” This was the case of the *Ingenio La Manuelita* in the central parts of the Valley, but it also worked in other Eder’s family possessions closer to the Paila River where their *Compañía Agrícola del Cauca* would conform one of the largest sugar plantations in the entire country: *El Ingenio Cauca*. Once ownership rights were secured, the next step was purchasing (usually under duress and using judicial authorities, or the police) the plots adjacent to the mills and owned by small farmers. When confronted by lawsuits, landowners made use of their economic and social position to win court cases against tenants and *terrazgueros*. In other instances, they simply used violence to solve conflicts over rights of use and property, as Michael Taussig has shown, when many tenants around the Palo and la Paila rivers were turned “into fully fledged wage-earning rural proletarians without any land, lumped into new villages such as Villarrica or Puerto Tejada” (Taussig 2008[1977]:423).

During these early decades of the twenty-century, the *hacienda* Japio, Quintero and La Bolsa were no longer property of the Arboleda family by this time. Yet the subdivision of the great *hacienda* didn’t make things easier for tenants and squatters. On the contrary, a myriad of new land claims from the different new owners must have been felt acutely. Threatening peasants with increasing land rentals, and pushing others using fences and clearing forests ended up putting people again at the doors of an armed conflict. It was often said to me, in the *veredas* around the low Palo River that if I wanted to talk to those that still have *la memoria* [the memory], I should visit La Caponera, Obando or La Paila. These places, among others, had been at the center of the struggles

for land around the 1920s. Those who lived by the roads, I was told, could tell more about the industries but not about the *haciendas*.

Oscar, a small and sturdy man with flashing white teeth had come to appreciate the subtle complexities of that spatial representation: “what happens is that some of our farms are still close to the rivers, for example this place where we are now is where I grew up with my mother. This was her land. Now is my brother’s, but he is about to be ninety and needs help,” said Oscar. “On the other hand, my daughters live in *la vereda* by the road. Today, there are more opportunities for them to work there, but they have to prepare themselves studying,” he added. For Oscar, times have changed dramatically since those past days when the river was the main avenue. He recalled growing running around eating lots of fish, “that is why I am still around, but anybody can tell you a little bit of that story. That is what happened in Villarica and Puerto Tejada too,” he insisted in a humble way.

I met Oscar about one kilometer downstream from Severo’s plantain and fruit trees (See chapter 2). As usual around these lands, his farm was flanked by sugar cane, and in the absence of previous majestic trees, tall chimneys from a paper company arose in the background. “My mother was born in 1908 and my father, he was older, he was born in 1890 I guess. They came from an area around Caloto.” Using his machete Oscar reaches an orange from one of his trees and cuts it in pieces: “Try them, and tell me if they are not juicy?” He says while cutting one for himself too. He was the youngest of six brothers. Three died at an early age, and the rest helped their mother when his father also passed away. “My mother could have told you good stories,” he said making an evident effort to remember, “but I have done my research too. I knew many elders around and

sometimes you have the chance to ask them about how we all ended up here. You see, since most of them worked with *guadua* boats in the river transporting plantains, *caña brava* [large and strong cane reed] and tobacco, they knew very well this lands not only around the Palo river, but also around La Paila, closer to Padilla,” Oscar remarked putting back his machete in his leather case.

When his parents moved to the north of Caloto and into the forested tributaries of the Cauca river valley, the Thousand Days’ War [1899–1902] had just passed and landowners were reasserting control over lands and tenants. “I think they left Japio looking for other estates that offered better terms,” Oscar told me. According to him their first job was *derrocando monte* [clearing the forest] and opening trails, but he insisted that as soon as the land was clear and connected, then “an owner appeared from nowhere.”

In the Cauca Valley, rural people as Oscar’s parents, who had been denied of lands and titles promised by their involvement in liberal revolts of the nineteenth century and who were obliged later to sign tenancy contracts, adopted in 1928 a more offensive strategy reasserting rights to public lands that had been abusively incorporated into *haciendas*. An illustrative example comes from a letter sent by *Terrazgueros* of the old hacienda La Bolsa (formerly part of Japio) to the liberal newspaper *El Relator* in Cali in 1925. The peasantry made the following terms:

It is a huge hacienda, better said a feudal property, which borders seem to be those of a Department or a Nation: Puerto Tejada, Caloto and Santander [de Quilichao]. In this immense balloon that was extensive and covered completely by woods, landlords made our parents tenants in exchange for tribute. They cleared the forest and expanded the agricultural frontier planting cacao and giving the land the civilize appearance it has today. With their work, with their sweat and arms, they increased the value of that wild land. (...) We repeat: we pay the tenancy fees in goodwill. This protest is

not to discuss if this fee is fair or not.(...) We are about five thousand, every one of us with families (...). We are united and we are decided to pay the rent for the land we work. But what we don't agree is that landlords want to charge us more for the crops or animals we have in our plots. That is when they don't take them by the force. We won't leave our plots, and we don't want to end up like our disposed brothers that beg in the streets (quoted in Sánchez and Meertens 1989:12-13, my translation).

The letter rightly insisted that these lands were valuable not precisely by natural or preexisting condition, but because tenants had made it valuable through their work. A few kilometers north in Puerto Tejada, an emergent workers union in 1920 followed a similar strategy by writing detailed accounts of the history of squatters and tenants in the area around the *hacienda* Quintero (Mina 2011:70-78). In an attempt to validate through these memories their claims to land, *Terrazgueros* in both areas actively appealed to the remnants of a liberal spirit, which they still felt favorable to their cause.

At this time, frontier settlers and peasant homesteaders began to identify with the nascent Left-wing political parties, especially Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's Revolutionary Leftist National Union (UNIR). The National Agrarian Party (PAN), and the newly formed Communist Party also appeared as options beyond the traditional parties. In general these different groups invigorated the cause of social rights of peasants to land and brought novel multi-class coalitions around issues of labor. Gaitán's movement, for instance, was a dissidence of the Liberal Party, which gained nationwide popularity among urban poor and peasants, following a United Fruit Company workers' strike and massacre in Magdalena in 1928 (LeGrand 1998, Green 2003).²⁵

From other sectors of the Colombian society, these Parties and the rising land tensions were perceived as part of a general "communist threat" that required immediate counterattack. As part of the anticommunist "crusade," emerged in the country the

Workers Union of Colombia (UTC, 1946) and its rural branch, the National Agrarian Federation (FANAL, 1946). The latter, estimated the Colombian scholar Cristina Escobar, was integrated by approximately 80.063 peasants in the Cauca Valley alone, of which the group of landless peasants was the most numerous: around 40.031 (Escobar 1987). With such federations and unions conservative sectors allied with the Catholic Church pretended to counter the “Marxist doctrine” with “the social doctrine of the church,” which according to one State official “did not encourage demagoguery or violent class struggle” (Escobar 1987:24-27).

Notwithstanding the pretended “anticommunist spirit” of these initiatives, the business elite of the valley rejected the practices that emerged from the training courses and unions efforts promoted by these centers. The generalized violence that followed Gaitán’s assassination in Bogotá on April 9, 1948 appeared to show that several groups preferred instead a heavier hand and a more direct approach to decompress the land and labor tensions.

Looking in a drawer under his TV set, a fifty-year old landless industrial worker named Bernardo asks me to wait till he finds something that “is going to be of great help for our conversation,” he says. He lives in a *vereda* along the road between Guachené and Puerto Tejada and has just arrived from his work in a factory that produces paper from sugar cane bagasse: “Here it is, look at this treasure,” he says handing me an old school notebook where his grandfather kept a precise record and chronicles of what happened to people he knew and the things he did around 1940s and 1950s (see Figure 28). “Look read here,” said Bernardo pointing at a yellowish page with blue handwriting. The impeccable calligraphy allowed me to read aloud:

Saturday November 26. The *vereda* is in the most distressing scare it has ever experienced. With this damn luck that liberalism had had, los *godos* [conservatives] have reduced us as devils in the abysm. And more with the persecution of the so called military police the people neither eat nor sleep because these men we really do fear them. We had heard the ravages of these fatal devils traversing the territory and doing wrongs to the people. Tormenting our great leaders also the society, because with the simple fact of being red one is send to sleep in the straw [murdered]. But we by grace had not felt evil because (Bernardo's grandfather Notebook).²⁶

"Reduced us as devils in the abysm," I repeated the words from the notebook.

"This is from the time of *La Violencia*, when *la chulavita* [conservative paramilitary forces] were active," Bernardo said grabbing back the notebook to show me other passages. "My grandfather managed to escape with others hiding for days among the crops, but he says in this *cuaderno* [notebook] that many leaders were killed, some women were raped and others resulted injured with barbed wire when trying to runaway," added Bernardo.

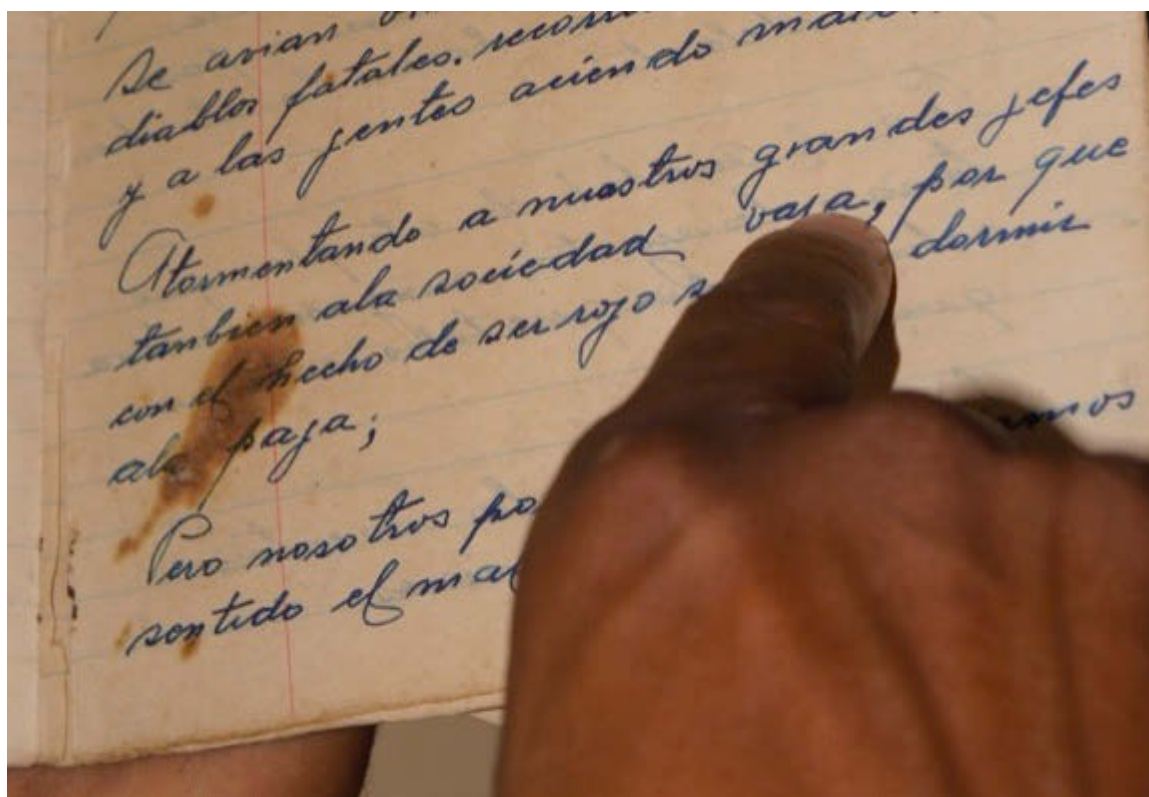


Figure 28. Bernardo's grandfather's Notebook from 1940s. Photograph by the author.

In deed with Gaitán's assassination, the country plunged into a long decade of civil confrontation known as *La Violencia*.²⁷ According to Bernardo's grandfather's notebook, the pressure on their lands increased during this time, when his family finally sold part of their farm to the *ingenio*, keeping only a house with a small garden by the motorway, which construction was rapidly changing the meandering logics of the river by the linear trace of the road. "The *ingenio* had rice planted here around the 1950s, but then they started planting sugarcane and bought together adjoining *haciendas* and *trapiches*," said Bernardo remembering those days. "My father was lucky to sell, I guess, because there were others that had cattle or maize whose lands were just flooded by their irrigations channels. In his plot he had cacao, coffee, and plantains planted. He was able to produce around 500 pesos annually. But the sell never equated that production level."

Precisely, as result of the Cuban Revolution, Colombia augmented in that decade its participation in the sugar market, boosting an aggressive expansion of plantations towards the southern end of the geographical Cauca River valley. Looking back at this expansion period, the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development added that the conditions of the area were also exceptional for the cultivation of sugarcane: [...]

"Besides from Peru and Hawaii, the geographic valley of the Cauca River, is one of the few areas of the world where sugarcane is harvested throughout the whole year, unlike what happens in the other sugarcane areas, in which the cane harvest lasts between four and six months only" (Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural 2005:2,3). This period also marked the transition of towns such as Villarica and Puerto Tejada, from marketplaces for peasant products to marketplaces for a labor force (De Roux 1991b:40).

But not all farmers and residents succumbed to the sugarcane, or lost their land by the pressure of its expansion. Agricultural Science had its part too. As Michael Taussig (1977), Nina S. De Friedemann (1976) and Jaime Arocha (1995) observed while studying peasant farming in the region in the early 1970, previous *fincas* were relatively regenerative and self-sustaining forms of small-scale agriculture (see Chapter 2).²⁸ Furthermore, Bernardo's neighbor recalled, for instance, that fruit trees, tobacco, coffee or cacao complement one another maintaining a fairly constant production throughout the year. Yet, since the beginning of scientific agriculture programs (e.g. Rockefeller Foundation's Colombian Agricultural Program, and CIAT), credit agencies as the *Caja Agraria* were responsible for supplying the hybrid and "improved" seeds on loan to farmers who after their harvests would be obliged to repay with interest. The distribution happened on a large scale and introduced many farmers in the banking system for the first time, requiring them to transform their *fincas* into *sembraderos*. As many inhabitants have recalled in oral histories with the new seed-based crops production ceased to be constant, harvesting in the best-case scenario by a pattern of quarterly or semi-annual cycles.

In the country hills surrounding Suárez and Mindala, The National Federation of Coffee Growers introduced in the 1970s the *Caturra* variety, originally discovered in Minas Gerais, Brazil. This variety replaced native seeds, advertising an increase in productivity levels, as it was said to be more resistant to coffee rust and to produce more beans in the same space, since trees could be planted closer from each other. However, for local black farmers, as María and Fernanda, this variety came along with pesticides and fertilizers, with a technification of the planting practices, and with a regulation of

prices. They recalled that previous varieties (e.g. *el arabico*) could grow even in *el monte* [the wild] without cleaning the ground or worrying about irrigation. “While, right now, since pesticides kill all the live that there is in the soil, you need fertilizer every two months and, even so, sometimes nothing is achieved,” Fernanda said.

At that time, no link was made however, between the infrastructural innovations and agricultural development policies promoted by institutions such as CVC or CIAT, and the violence and conflict arising in the countryside due to the lost of land and local ecological systems. To conclude this section, a final quote from the 1952 report of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Colombian Agricultural Program to the Foundation Trustees, at the end of the third year of program operation is telling in this regard.

Bolivar, the Liberator, called his union of Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, “Gran Colombia.” The term is appropriate to Colombia itself, for the eternal mountains, green valleys, spreading plains and tropical shoreline on two seas, make Colombia indeed a land of geological, botanical and physical grandeur. The humanly disturbing factor is the political one, the bitter conflict between Conservatives and Liberals. But that has not touched the agricultural program and does not belong in this story (RAC Record Group 1.2, Series 311, Box 1, Folder 1).

Bernardo’s grandfather notebook, on the other hand, began with the record of Gaitán’s assassination, annotated along with his activities as constructor, farmer, and laborer in the *hacienda Normandía* along the Palo River. That same year he built by contract two households, a kitchen, a bench, an adobe oven, and planted pineapples, yuccas, and cacao trees in his plot. A year later on July 5, 1949 when the elections for Councilors, Deputies and Representatives were celebrated, he chronicled with joy that in Puerto Tejada liberals achieved 2.453 votes against 126 conservatives and 8 communist. That month he also registered the planting of banana and plantains in his garden. For him, as for many other

residents I encounter in northern Cauca the question of politics was indissociable from their livelihoods.

The making of a 'socially responsible economic region'

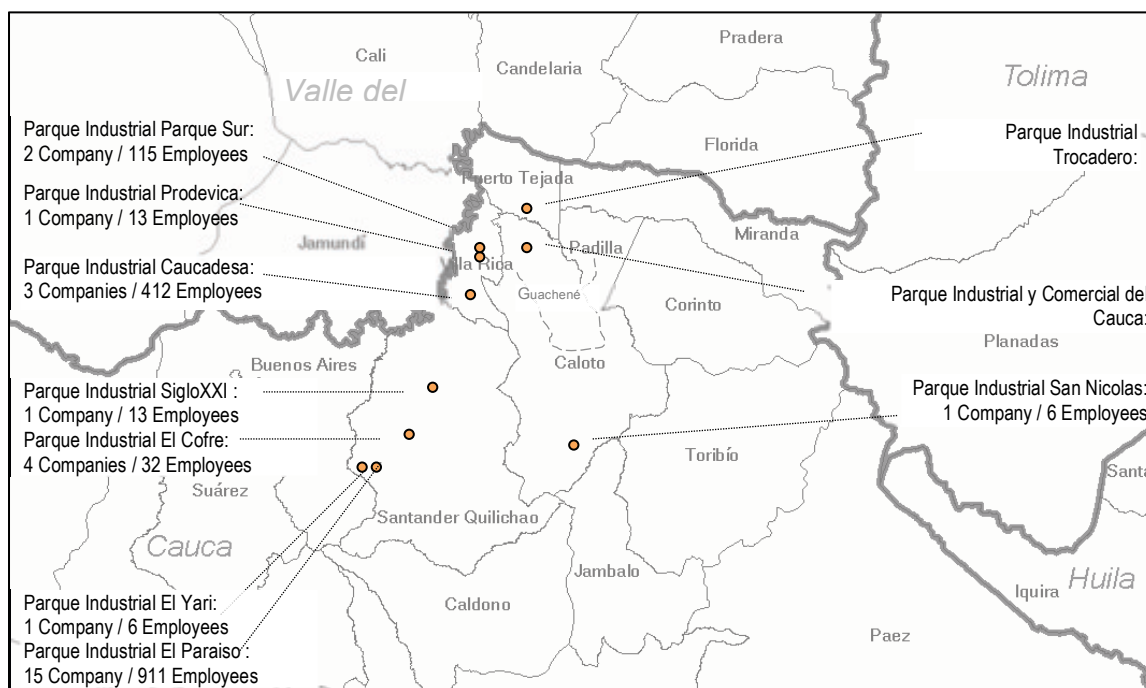
As I have show through this chapter, the northern Cauca region experienced since the second half of the twentieth-century, rapid socioeconomic and landscape changes directed mainly by heavily capitalized infrastructures and scientific agricultural development. Yet not all these transformations can be attributed to the “green revolution” alone, neither to the growth of the sugarcane cluster after the Cuban Revolution, or to the recent production of biofuels that have added recently even more extensions of sugarcane plantations. In the 1980s and 1990s, flood control, electric power generation developments, and privatization policies also boosted an aggressive expansion of industries in the region. At the same time, adding to the number of previous boom and bust cycles in different kinds of products, cocaine-funded economies and the flourishing of the gold mining sector in the last decades brought back the interconnections that had placed the region on the global charts since colonial times.

In the last decades, as this section will show, a myriad of business initiatives and strategies have added complexity to this picture restructuring development plans and industrialization interests under the flags of ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CRS), entrepreneur and peace building initiatives.²⁹ Laws and decrees that have created favorable conditions for national and foreign companies operating in the area have accompanied these shifts. This is the case of Law 218, also known as *Ley Páez*, which transformed the region into a target of neoliberal economic projects since the mid 1990s. In what follows I will analyze briefly its development, and its subsequent articulation

with the UN Global Compact—a transnational initiative that claims to promote human rights and regional ‘stability’—to show how not always, or at least not to everyone, the endless fields of sugarcane plantations and the shine of the recent metalized industrial areas appear as the incarnation of an uneven social relation capable of producing dispossession. To landless industrial workers such as Bernardo, in the flatlands around Villarica, and Guachené, these sites generated also contradictory desires for improvement, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility.

On June 6, 1994, a magnitude 6.4 earthquake and subsequent landslide damming struck off a rural and mountainous area on the Central Cordillera of the Andes in Southwestern Colombia predominantly inhabited by indigenous people known as Páez. The avalanche damaged more than fifteen towns and villages along the Páez river killing around 1100 people and affecting more than 8000 families.³⁰ Different state interventions took place over the following years of the disaster, but one of the most comprehensive was the creation of a special law, named *Ley Páez* in 1995. This Law offered tax benefits and later free trade zone options to companies who set up installations in the affected region.³¹ However, the wide definition of the “disaster zone” allowed for controversy. The Law ended up covering in fact zones far beyond the Páez territory reaching even the northern Cauca region, approximately 130 kilometers away from the disaster zone.³² The earthquake and the subsequent avalanche by no means affected this region, but in theory the idea was to benefit those who had been displaced by the disaster. Yet no real effort was made to train and employ those who had been adversely affected (Gow 2008:166). On the contrary, taking advantage of the wide spatial coverage of the special law, several industrial areas emerged in Towns miles away from the epicenter of the disaster, such as

Guachené, Villarica, and Santander de Quilichao. This was an index, as I will show, that the government allowed corporations to take advantage of the law, and that corporations had different priorities in mind (see Map 13).



Map 13. Companies benefiting from Law Páez in 2005, close to the end the ten-year period of validity. Outside industrial areas 67 more companies were hiring around 1695 workers. The location of the industrial areas is approximate. Map elaborated by the author with data from Alonso y Lotero 2006.

Three years after its promulgation, the Cauca's Chamber of Commerce registered 957 newly constituted societies, and seven years later 139 companies in northern Cauca were already operating as beneficiaries of the special Law, approximately half of them located within gated industrial areas. The greatest concentration was found in Santander de Quilichao (59), Guachené (37), and Caloto (12), hiring in total 3541 employees. Most of these firms were devoted to the manufacturing sector (98.3%), while only 18.7% of

them corresponded to the agricultural sector (Alonso and Lotero 2006:20, 21). As a local economic magazine stated: “from producing sand and sugarcane, we went on to produce paper, food, energy and pharmaceutical products” (Dinero 1998). Among the companies that operate today, there are firms producing precooked maize flours and malts for the North American market, others exporting aluminum and plastic forms for construction systems in Cameroon, and sweatshops producing from power cables to toilet paper, napkins, disposable diapers and sanitary towels (El Tiempo 2012).

However, in the eyes of residents most of these jobs were not being equally distributed throughout the region. Despite the growing labor demand and industrial diversification that the Law attracted, great numbers of employment vacancies were being given to people outside northern Cauca towns. Companies argued that some of the offered jobs demanded qualified personnel only available in the neighboring cities such as Cali, but insisted that this was only a small fraction. A study conducted by Cauca’s Chamber of Commerce in 2000 seemed to give the reason to entrepreneurs. The report denounced that the educational levels of northern Cauca workers did not meet the standards of the new industries:

[...] in the selection of candidates whom the companies advance, the low profile of the working competencies shown principally by the young people of the region becomes evident. They presented great gaps in reading and writing, understanding of basic mathematics, oral expression and attitude towards working on a team. To this one should add the lack of knowledge these people show in front of the new realities of the world of work and the new business culture (Camara del Comercio del Cauca 2000,96 quoted in Gow 2008:165).

Thus, although the Law enforced the hiring of a high percentage of local labor (around 60%), some entrepreneurs found the cost of the fines less problematic than assuming the costs of qualifying locals. Others were suspected of using the Law as an

opportunity to “clean up” their taxes channeling their profits through of a firm registered in the “disaster area” but without actually transferring their operations to the area (Byrne 2002:28). For those that could enter the labor pool, employment was characterized by low income, precariousness and insecurity (Vanegas and Rojas 2012: 24, 25).

But deception with the Law went beyond the issue of employment. Carolina is the daughter of a sugarcane worker man and a cacao grower woman, and works in a multinational corporation that manufactures PVC pipes in the industrial area near Guachené. Her reflections about the Law are evocative of many of the local struggles and expectations generated since its promulgation. As part of a CSR program organized to promote the development of local suppliers for the plant, focusing on female workers, Carolina and other women were able to set an Association, which provides today food services to the plant’s employees and also manufactures cloth used to clean plant machinery and equipment. Her mother began working early in the rice fields where the industrial areas are settled today, “later all that became sugarcane and it was my father who had to prepare that land for the change,” said Carolina. “But when the Law came, the mill took its chance too, and built the industrial citadel on those fields to profit from the opportunity,” she said. The area assigned for the industrial zone reached 1.200.000 square meters. Industrial groups from the Valley, such as Lloreda S.A. —that specializes in food products as margarine, and cleaning products derived from oils and fats—, bought also plots in the region to subdivide and sell in portions to smaller companies (Dinero 1998).

Curiously, around that time her Carolina’s father had received his first extra monetary compensation in 36 years of work in the mill. “He wanted to use that money to

buy, or at least, rent land again to expand our small cacao farm adding coffee and plantains,” remembered Carolina. When most dispossessed farmers had already migrated to the growing urban centers as Villarica or Puerto Tejada, Carolina’s father stubbornly attempted to remain in his small plot. “However, with the Law the land prices around here increased, and we were not able to buy anything. Before the Law an hectare could be around four million pesos (about 1330 USD), but then it rose till something we have never seen, it was *millones de millones de pesos* [multimillion pesos].” In accordance to Carolina’s testimony, only three years after the Páez act was implanted, the press reported that the value of the land multiplied by 10, the square meter went from \$ 2,000 to \$ 20,000 pesos and up to \$ 35,000 (Direno 1998). Industrial energy consumption grew as well, up to 150%. The demand was met by the construction of a private thermal energy station and an agreement with the national providers outside the region.

Carolina and her family expected that the Law would bring social investment to the region in the form of more educational institutions, drinkable water, better roads and supplementary technical assistance for farmers. Instead of that her family lost the opportunity of owning land again, and she ended up asking for job in the industries once the family cacao farm succumbed to the plagues that since the fifties had been affecting the crops of small farmers. Some tax professionals would agree with Carolina’s perspective describing the Law as the consequence of both poor drafting and outright tax fraud:

The 100% tax credit for investment in affected areas involved an immediate revenue cost, yet the related investment did not have to be carried out for several years. In some cases, the subject investment was not even made in an affected area, because the law specified only that the enterprise had to be “based” in the area (Byrne 2002:28).

As a response to these local perceptions and challenges, in 2009 a group of corporations began negotiations to develop what they called a “social responsible economic region,” following the ‘Global Compact’ initiative launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1999. In this reframing of their mission, the support and respect to the protection of international human rights was not completely seen as a response to the negative impact of neoliberal globalization, but as an integral part of the capitalist property and production relations. Although, it can be argued that the use of the ‘Global Compact’ logo, especially by some sugarcane refineries was more of a “green washing” strategy than anything else, in the case of the industrial area, and it was thought from the beginning as a way of securing an individualized labor force and a “stable” and “marked-friendly” region. In fact, the industrial area has been used to promote and advance the initiative in the region, aiming to root its principles within local and cultural-specific contexts and to create opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement (UN Global Compact 2010).

What is particular to the ‘Global Compact’ initiative, when compared with more local forms of ‘corporate social responsibility,’ is that it relies on indicators to assess compliance with their general principles, plus its support for the UN Millennium Development Goals. In other words, it is not only a distinction between a juridical logic regulated by laws and treaties and a more elusive ethical responsibility, but it is also a distinction that has to do with the problem of accountability and with the distinction between secular and altruistic practices, universalistic and local dimensions. The UN Global Compact is defined as “a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted

principles in the areas of HR, labor, environment and anti-corruption” (UN Global Compact, 2010). The UNGC web site claims that its interest is to bring companies together with United Nations organizations, international labor organizations, NGOs and other parties to foster partnerships and to build a more inclusive and equitable global marketplace.

Thus, in the name of the “right to intervene” as ‘responsible’ citizens and promote socioeconomic ‘growth,’ these enterprises and their supporters have constructed specific subjects of intervention (e.g., by race, gender or age) that rarely coincided with the priorities of the communities or with the idea of rights that they mobilize. On the contrary, the conflation of economic activities with these modalities of rights manifested on the ground in private social interventions, which were at once the vehicle for fostering an “entrepreneurial spirit” and also a way of managing populations. Moreover, when the validity of the Law expired, well-established companies managed to obtain new tax benefits sponsored under the declaration of a new decree (780 of 2008), which enabled existing industrial areas to form Free Trade zones. Among the seven zones established in 2009, six landed in northern Cauca alone, the largest being the *Zona Franca Permanente del Cauca* [Permanent Free Trade Zone of Cauca] that developed from the previous industrial area created in Guachené.

What became evident to the early observers of this process and later to the “subjects of intervention” —as people ended up being called in ‘corporate social responsibility’ programs—was that public and private sectors took the special Law as an opportunity for building governance and increasing the “competitiveness” of a region seen by the state and regional elites as a guerrilla and delinquency stronghold. In

interviews held with some white Colombian entrepreneurs and local businessman working in the area, it was common to hear —as a way perhaps of justifying their mission—a structural interpretation of guerilla and delinquency, attributing it to poverty and absence of the state. I found, however, that this case did not follow the traditional image of the retreat of the state epitomized by the “structural adjustment” measures imposed by international financial institutions. Here the state’s functions were not privatized or passed from the government to the industry and businesses. On the contrary, the philanthropy of private enterprises and later its ‘corporate social responsibility’ were actually filling in a vacuum that the state was allowing them to fill.

The Colombian sociologist Fernando Urrea has seen this process as part of the urbanization process that crossed this whole region since the eighties under the dynamic of extending the metropolitan area of Cali to the whole of northern Cauca (Urrea and Rodríguez 2012). By means of the Páez Law the labor market diversified beyond the agro-industrial sector, and beyond the demand for domestics and construction workers that usually attracted people from the foothills and the mountainous territories to the urban areas of the valley. But the Páez Law did something far more complex than simply accelerating or intensifying proletarianization processes in the region. As I will show in the following section, it introduced neoliberal entrepreneurialism as a way of middle class life and subjectivity (Freeman 2014).

‘Buen vecino’

During the US “Good Neighbor” policies of the 1930s and beginning of 1940s, military and unilateral intervention in Latin American countries temporarily gave way to a series of

exchanges and support programs. Predominately these programs attempted to reassert the influence of the United States in the region through a system guided by international cooperation. Among these cooperation initiatives the figure of advisors and analysts emerged a new a new corps of soldiers with more refined and sophisticated weapons. Responding to a Colombian delegation sent to Washington seeking advise and funds to modernize the country's agricultural sector, the rural sociologist Thomas Lynn Smith arrived in the country on September of 1943 coming from Louisiana State University (Lorek 2013:283). After spending over a year touring the country, Smith argued that in regions such as the Cauca Valley agricultural development, labor, and the rural sector in general, could benefit greatly from fostering a rural middle-class farmer, which "simultaneously possess the skills of a capitalist entrepreneur, a manager, and a laborer" (Smith in Lorek 2013:300). Likewise, regional elites involved in projects such as the agricultural experimental station in Palmira, also had similar ideas (see Chapter 3). However, with the aggressive expansion of sugarcane industry, and the violence generated by the inequality of agricultural development and resource extraction in the Valley, the project of creating an agricultural middle-class failed in the second half of the twenty century (see Chapter 4). Once again, especially in the northern Cauca region, the fault was attributed to labor unrest and the lack of entrepreneurship of black peasants and rural laborers.

But the question of how individuals can get involved in a social class relation, as the one proposed by Smith, is an historical and processual one. A question that, as I have try to show in this chapter, can only be addressed by attending, over a considerable historical period, to how contingent factors, specific conditions and independent agency

gave rise to a social phenomenon that was at the same time “present at its own making” (Thompson 1968: 9). As I will show in the next vignette, a kind of labor, which was able and willing to produce itself, demanded a cultural work beyond the social relations of production.

“We are people who are not afraid to share the many failures we have gone through in the last twenty-four years working with a community in great need. We believe that in order to improve ‘social intervention’ processes it is very important to share not only the successes we have had, but also our failures,” Dr. Pérez clarifies to me before our conversation has even started. He is the chief executive officer of a Social Foundation operated by a company that produces paper from sugarcane bagasse in the Valley (*Productora de Papeles S.A. Propal*) (see Figure 29). We are seated in an empty classroom of a private University founded by local business leaders in the region. The setting seems to help him feel more confident about the interview. However, he seems to be anticipating my questions. He tries to show from start that he is aware of the problems associated with ‘corporate social responsibility,’ and tries hard to persuade me that the company for which he works cares for people too: “In fact,” Dr. Pérez goes along saying, “I don’t like the concept of intervention. I think it is invasive and intrusive. I used it as short hand for an activity that has become current in corporate social responsibility programs, but what I really mean is working along with the community,” he insists.

Dr. Pérez has brought a PowerPoint presentation with him. In the opening slide two quotes explain the way he understands their social work and their mission as a Social Foundation. The first one is Benjamin Franklin’s famous line about ‘doing good to the poor:’

I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it. I observed...that the more public provisions were made for the poor, the less they provided for themselves, and of course became poorer. And, on the contrary, the less was done for them, the more they did for themselves, and became richer (Benjamin Franklin).

The second comes from *The Economic Commission for Latin America* (ECLA) funded in 1948 by the United Nations:

Social innovation means new ways of doing things. New forms of management in the region, that allow better results than traditional models, that are cost efficient and, very important, that promote and strengthen the participation of the community and beneficiaries, turning them into true actors for their own development, and therefore strengthening citizen consciousness in the region, and with it, democracy (CEPAL, 2010:7).



Figure 29. The paper company as seen from the sugarcane fields along the Palo River. Photograph by the author.

These two quotes combined help Dr. Pérez draw a distinction between “assistentialism” and “development:”

The former is what we did when we began working. We as an industrial plant had a negative impact on the surrounding communities, and we were not addressing that impact properly. We were giving things, buying food supplies, fixing quotidian issues, but not necessarily producing development. The latter, describes better what we are doing now.

What was this about? Why did he find it necessary to rise to clarify the concept of ‘intervention’ as harmless and participative? Dr. Pérez’ presentation occurred in the firsts months of my fieldwork. I wasn’t planning to meet him until I had a more bottom-to-top approach, but Pérez insistence that the company knew the hamlets around the flatlands of the Palo River better than anyone else persuaded me to hear his account. After all, as James Ferguson has made clear in making his case for how recent capital investment in Africa has been territorialized, ‘seeing like a company’ in today’s neoliberal global capitalism entails much more than taking care of business (Ferguson 2005).

“That Benjamin Franklin’s idea is what drives today our CSR; *hacer que puedan vivir sin recibir!* [make them live without receiving!]. That implies changing people, make them have a vision of what they can achieve. I don’t know how much time or work it takes, but the idea is that one day we could have a plant manager born and raised here in the *vereda*.” Dr. Pérez’ account revealed not only the call for corporations to develop ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) and conform to basic human rights principles, but also a broader social project associated with ideas of entrepreneurship and development.³³ Although inhabitants usually complained that local capacitation and educative programs only focused on preparing plain technicians, instead of highly professional supervisors and chief executives, while listening to Dr. Pérez’ confident voice, I constantly recalled

Ricardo's aspiration of owning and running his own business.

Six months after my encounter with Dr. Pérez, I began spending time with Julian, a former sugarcane worker and currently small entrepreneur sponsored by Dr. Perez's Foundation. I met him in a workshop promoted by the Paper Company and a public health department of a local University. One day, seating in his living room, I asked him about how he understood Dr. Perez's Foundation CSR he described as their own achievement:

"In 1998," Julian said, "we blocked this road and managed to pressure the paper company to meet our demands. We needed medical services, schools and overall jobs," Julian explained inscribing the priorities of his *vereda* in a tradition of protests and demands not as black peasants, but as citizens and city dwellers (see Chapter 4). "Our slogan back then was: *If there is nothing for us, neither for them*," said Julian remembering that September morning when he and thirty other people stood in front of trucks and cars that were trying to access the industrial area.³⁴ "At that time I was no longer working for the sugarcane mill, I had not managed to secure a stable job either, so I was dedicated to various tasks. Sometimes I went to the river to extract sand, others I managed to obtain temporal positions in the city as a condominium guard or gardener, but something was clear for all of us in the same position: These industries were arriving by numbers, and they seemed to be making good money. They entered in their fancy cars and built these huge factories, but there was nothing for us. Everyone seemed to be benefiting, except for us," said Julian.

In the eyes of Dr. Pérez, the strike, described by Julian, was what made them realize as a company that they were not doing things properly. "The future lay," said Dr.

Pérez, “in a *Good Neighbor* campaign, that’s how we named it. The idea was that it could act, first as an emergency plan to counter the violent situation generated by protesters, and later as a program that would allow us to remain in the area,” added Dr. Pérez remembering what he learned back on those turmoil months. “Propal is a plant that is worth 400 million dollars, so it could not be dismantled just like that. We could not go away from there. We arrived to stay, so we knew that we have to work with the community, but this did not mean ‘buying tranquility.’ We are arrived to generate development in the community, this is how we see it today, and our dream is to have mature relationships of respect, that we speak to each other as equals,” he said sustaining a self-image as benevolent yet lowering his head to avoid eye contact. Overall, resembling the US foreign policies popularized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1930s, with the *Good Neighbor* campaign the company expected to create new economic opportunities, while reasserting their influence in the area. This was also an effort to make a difference with past forms of intervention. As Dr. Pérez recognized, and also Julian recalled not without despair, before the strike and the so-called *Good Neighbor* campaign, the relationship between the Company and the local inhabitants was handled by a retired military official whose main concern was to guaranteeing the continuing operation of the company. Social intervention was then seen a matter of security.

The company was in many ways ahead of the trend that the region would experience a few years later; first, with the mid 1990s privatization processes (as happened with the Salvajina Dam in 1993), and second with the positioning of CSR as a new panacea to underdevelopment at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Being one of the first examples in the country of a successful process of

privatization, the company began its operations in Guachené in 1990 acquiring a national paper company (Papelcol).³⁵

Dr. Pérez started working on those transitional years, but he recalled with pride being the ones that made the Guachené factory produced its first piece of paper in 1992. “The factory, which is today our second plant in the valley [the first one is close to Yumbo north of Cali] was built in 1982 by Papelcol. It was a pioneer enterprise, because you have to keep in mind that it was the first industry different to the sugarcane mills to arrive in the northern Cauca, but they couldn’t make it work,” said Dr. Pérez. From Julian perspective, it was “a match made in heaven, or hell to be more precise,” he said. El Naranjo and La Cabaña, sugarcane mills that today operate as a single enterprise, were operating close by and “they were producing lots of bagasse of the cane, but the didn’t know what do to do with it. I remember the smell of bagasse decomposing; they were drying and filling lagoons and wetlands with that. But when Propal arrived the problem became a business opportunity,” said Julian.

In several conversations and interviews, inhabitants from the *vereda* commented on the changes brought about by the factory. Most had a clear image of the impact on the river, which was already affected by levee dikes, irrigation channels, and by the action of chemical waste and oils poured into the waters by the sugarcane industrial mills. With the paper company starting operations in 1992, inhabitants argued that river died: “I recall seeing that river full of dead fishes, almost without water, and smelling badly,” said a woman forced today to buy drinkable water from the *carretilleros* [wheelbarrow] that charge her one thousand pesos for a gallon of water that they collect at the entrance of the paper company.³⁶ In the demonstrations and protests of 1998 people raised these

concerns, but the main anxieties had changed. In the six-year span between the starting of operations and the strike, people seemed to have embraced the contradictions, ambivalences, and hopes of industrial areas. “Everything started with the firing of two workers, one of them was my uncle,” remembered Isabel a domestic worker who is currently finishing a food-handling course that she hopes will grant her a better job. “He among others realized that since we were the community most exposed to the companies, we deserved better conditions,” Isabel said showing me the commitment deeds written by the organizers of the protest. “We didn’t want them to leave, we want them to comply: we demanded that inhabitants of the *vereda* should compose at least 6% of the payroll of the company, we asked them to improve the school, the recreation facilities and the transportation system of our children, and since usually we were told that we were not properly qualified for industrial jobs, we demanded scholarships and support for technical and professional studies.”

According to residents and demonstrators this is where the idea of forming microenterprises arose. Instead of seeing entrepreneurship as imposed by a *Good Neighbor* campaign, people started to see it as an accomplishment of their struggles. Among the people I studied there was a powerful motivation for becoming entrepreneurs, usually associated with a feeling of excitement, passion, and anxiety at the same time. For Julian, for instance, being an entrepreneur meant being autonomous and independent. “I know you talk to me about food sovereignty and control over resources, but that did not grant my elders much,” said Julian the day I asked him to explain to me what his small business was all about. “My grandfather couldn’t leave us anything. But I understand his situation, back in those days with the expansion of the sugarcane and the

plagues it was difficult to keep a farm,” he continued directing me towards the back of his house. “So I don’t complain about that, but there is something that has changed. I remember he telling my dad and mother that things only needed time: *dele tiempo al tiempo* [give time to time], he used to say. Today, I cannot think in that way. With my micro-enterprise, I need to have a well-designed plan. Is not just a matter of time, is a matter of planning, of foreseeing,” said Julian.

As soon as we entered his patio, we found his wife shucking and shelling corn. She was seated in a green plastic chair with a hunched posture. “That is another project we have,” he said showing me an old metal grinder adapted to a one horsepower electrical engine, “this is a marvel, before we spent hours grinding corn, but now we only have to plug this cable and the rest is just adding cheese and giving shape to the *arepas* [a sort of bread made out of corn].” In a small soldering and welding workshop, Julian had made the iron structure that assembled the motor and the grinder in a single machine. That was actually what his job was all about. “I am a professional welder,” he said.

After the strike and the protests that led to the *Buen Vecino* campaign, Propal encouraged the formation of a cluster of small business devoted to all sorts of construction specialties: carpentry, painting, welding, and electrical installations. Julian knew welding was essential in the new industry, and he knew that by the type of cord or thread one makes when welding, someone could recognize a good welder. So when the opportunity arrived, “I showed them that I was good,” he said, “and I insisted that it didn’t make sense for the company to hire people from Cali that where more expensive and where not always present.” he said. Thus, Julian didn’t see the process in terms of a top-down imposition; he saw it as the result of their vision. “With these micro-enterprises

we were able not only to push the company to take us seriously, but we were also able to get better with training and learned how to manage a business,” he added. “My grandfather had his plants counted, he knew what to put together, and when to sow each crop. He knew when the rains were coming, but now I have to take care of how efficient my business is, I have to evaluate my costs and earnings in order to optimize production and profit,” Julian’s booming voice reverberates off the walls of his workshop. Above his head hung a relief picture with a vessel and a coffer projecting above the background plane. From the latter streams of silver coins were falling into the vessel like a cascade. A nude celestial figure, wrapped in silk robes, contemplated the scene. “It brings prosperity,” said Julian once he discovered me looking at the picture. “That is exactly what we wanted here, that is why we pushed not only for jobs, but also for training in entrepreneurship,” Julian affirmed.

These practices of calculation and planning, the learning of new concepts, and the management of other people have turned out to be practices and sensibilities that configured changes in Julian’s subjectivity, as well in other residents of the area. Registering the small business in the Chamber of Commerce, paying taxes, paying social security, assuring that his employees have their safety equipment and their proper technical courses, and always being on the look for opportunities, has been for him a more complex and demanding work than what his elders did under the sun. With this will and persuasion for becoming entrepreneurs, the ‘demon’s land’ of Eder finally seemed to transform itself into a paradise populated by entrepreneurs.

Final remarks

Some studies have explained infrastructural development, the rise of agroindustry, and proletarianization processes in general, as a linear process of modernization guided by a landed oligarchy, or as a sudden and dramatic change orchestrated from abroad.

However, in this chapter I have tried to ground the analysis in a historical and more localized view, one that fully considers the deep regional histories, global connections, and the multiple tensions that are imbricated in political ecologic relations, agrarian history, and governmental policies.

The social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century, combined with the Cauca Valley's own project throughout the early 20th century of governing through jobs and industry contributed to imagine not only a mechanism that articulated race, nature and difference, but also forms of aspiring economic development, and entrepreneurship. Here, the liberal disciplinary schema went beyond formal educational institutions, and entered into the work place and their related 'corporate social responsibility' initiatives. Industry, infrastructure, and technological innovations became central pieces in regional and nation-building projects that attempted to transform the "demon's land" into the "paradise" white regional elite envisioned.

By the time the industrial zones and businesses linked to the Páez act began to establish in the region, a middle-class, which could embody the skills of an entrepreneur, a manager, and a laborer, seemed not so distant as Eder saw it. Although, with the new enclave economy, guerrilla, and paramilitary forces also began to intensify their actions, there were new elements in place, which tilted the balance morally, and politically in favor of transforming the "demons" into a rising entrepreneurial middle-class. The cheap

labor produced by centuries of racialized labor regimes, needed now an update outside the social relations of production. In this shifting regional context, there was indeed a greater demand for technical high schools and colleges that could supply the industries with the necessary workers. But as Althusser reminded us, long time ago, a technically competent, but politically insubordinate laborer is no labor force at all for capital (Althusser 1971, Hall 1985). If in colonial times doctrine chapels fulfilled this role efficiently, ‘corporate social responsibility’ and its signature elements came to foster in the region,

Yet, “demons” did not go away so easily. What could not be accomplished through reformist’s projects, was finally achieved with violent incursions in the countryside. In this sense, *La Violencia* did not hinder capitalist expansion of the Valley. On the contrary, the rates of urbanization, industrialization, proletarianization, were reinforced during its worst years. It was one of the times with the highest number of migrants to urban centers (368,900 in the Valley alone), as well the number of agricultural parcels lost (98,400) (Sánchez and Meertens 1989:24). As landlords definitely turned to wage labor, many families in the area could no longer hold tenancy of their farms, and sold it then at very low prices. Exploiting chronic debt and taking advantage of the civil unrest, landlords forcefully sought to expropriate crops and evict settlers from the area a kind of labor, which was able and willing to produce itself.

Finally, although these various initiatives related to infrastructural, agricultural and entrepreneurial development could be interpreted, in Ingold’s terms, as a “lines of occupation” that divide the land (Ingold 2007), or as “project of legibility and simplification” in Scott’s jargon (Scott 1998), they also became central for specific forms

of emplacement and subjectivity for *nortecaucanos* black peasants. As there was a name for every rapid and twist in the river, there ended up being a story behind the many stops and trajectories of the train, or even places of memory and desire related to the Salvajina reservoir and the Industrial Zones. More than dots connecting or dislocating places, these sites became important markers and aspirations in *nortecaucanos*' life.

Chapter 4. From land to territory

I found myself staring at a large sign in the old route that connects the town of Jamundi, near Cali, with Suárez in the southwestern corner of the Cauca Valley (See Figure 30). The border that divides the Valley and the Cauca Departments is still ten kilometers away from where I am standing. Compared to the layout of the Pan American Highway, along the flatlands, this route appears shorter and most of the times makes the trip more graceful than touring through the extensive sugar cane plantations.¹ Yet, recently sugarcane has been advancing here too, finding within these undulating foothills, suitable areas for its linear furrows. Indeed, passing the *balnearios* [bathing sites] in the outskirts of Jamundi the road becomes partially paved, or as people later told me: “ruined by sugar cane tractors.”

With rusty posts and growing vegetation hanging over, the sign salutes the traveler heading southwest: “*Bienvenidos: Valoramos tu aporte al desarrollo del territorio Afrodescendiente del sur del Valle y norte del Cauca.*” [Welcome: We value your contribution to the development of the Afrodescendant territory of the south of the Valley and north of Cauca]. The billboard corresponded to a fund plan developed by the *Corporación Autónoma Regional del Cauca* (CVC) in conjunction with local entities. The fund claims to be directed towards the restoration and sustainable benefitting of biodiversity, and seeks the active participation of the civil society, highlighting indigenous and black communities (CVC Acuerdo CD No.16, 2012).



Figure 30. *Territorio Afrodescendiente* sign in Guachinte. Photograph by the author.

Surprisingly, in this particular section of the road there is nothing to be seen around but cattle hills and sugarcane. The possibility of such “sustainable development” programs to exist has always puzzled me. Yet, this time there is something else that strikes me. The idea contained in the sign of a unified “Afrodescendant territory” that comprises both sides of the departmental border captures my attention. Where does this synthesis of an “Afrodescendant territory” comes from? And, moreover how is it related to visions of “sustainable development”? How are people in northern Cauca experiencing these ideas? Or better stated, how did old questions about land end up being transformed into the languages of development and territory?

This chapter pays particular attention to *nortecaucanos*’ rights mobilizations and their different historical and ecological trajectories to explore how the idea of “territory” has taken such powerful salience, often to the extent of appearing to be primordial and pre-given. Furthermore, by looking at how some groups struggle to defend place and gain recognition or a degree of sovereignty, most of the time “failing” at the expected cultural and spatial dimensions of distinctiveness set by state-endorsed “multicultural” reforms, this chapter interrogates what kinds of claims have more traction in the neoliberal state. In this sense, it asks how state and transnational definitions of “blackness,” “territory,” and “development” have become inscribed, aspired, and challenged in a particular region as the Cauca River valley.

According to the approach developed in the first chapters, the contradictions between the cultural production of “blackness” and the emergent rights languages are not analyzed by simply framing them in terms of the ‘politics of identity’ and the useful insights of discourse and representation analysis. On the contrary, the chapter tracks the

historical continuities of social and material practices that have shaped racialized subject formation and ordered new strategies of governance in the region. In other words, it uses *nortecaucanos*' active engagement with state-endorsed "multicultural" reforms and development discourses, to investigate what such policies and categorizations can tell us about the configurations, tensions, and effects of state-making processes in Colombia today. Here, I examine not only the discourses and practices involved in the production of new patterns of control over land, and populations, but also the struggles to "occupy" their meanings and spaces. This means, attending to the different material conditions, subject positions, and practices afforded by multicultural and developmental regimes, as well as to their meanings and values as they are actively lived in landscapes, livelihoods, and subjectivities.

Peasant, civic, and popular movements

Two months after I encountered the "Afrodescendant territory" sign by the road, I visited Julian the micro-entrepreneur I had previously met close to the industrial zone of Guachené in the flatlands. I showed him the picture of the sign in my camera and asked him about the lack of 'black community councils' (as defined by the Law 70) in his *vereda*:

"Look, I think that it is only a new name for an old necessity," said Julian lying back in his sofa. It is near midday and Julian and I are seated in his living room; the passing trucks heading to the industrial area, just 400 meters down the road, make us speak louder than usual. "Previously most *veredas* were organized around *Juntas de Acción Comunal* [JAC, Communal Action Groups]," he said. "We even have two: one

that is favorable to the company and another one that is more distant. In other parts, people have organized by mining cooperatives, as well as in peasant organizations. Anyway, I am very hesitant about *los concejos* [of black communities], that is something that came with the Law,” he affirmed caressing his sofa’s fabric.

“But were not the *Juntas* also created by Law?” I asked him challenging his sense of immunity against “state effects.”

“Well, yes, you are right, but back then it was clearer and feasible what people were fighting for,” he said expressing with his arms and hands wide open, what he believed to be an evident truth. “We have strike here for better working and living conditions. We needed medical services, schools and above all jobs,” added Julian inscribing the priorities of his *vereda* in a tradition of protests and demands not as black peasants, but as citizens and city dwellers.

Julian’s narrative is related to his position as a landless industrial worker, but his perceptions and memories are helpful here to start broadening the perspective about past forms of political organizing and to show a variation of positions regarding the current ethnicization of blackness in Colombia.² Before the multicultural constitution of 1991 *nortecaucano* populations had recourse to identity and cultural concerns and at times used them to great effect in moving to the political scene (Hurtado 2000:41).³ However, those drives were only one strategy among a wider repertoire of social mobilization. As described earlier in chapter 2, during post independence times *nortecaucanos* and other rural subalterns actively negotiated and shaped the meanings of liberalism and republicanism by aligning with the nascent Liberal Party which abolished slavery, freed monopolies, swore to “strengthen the principle of equality,” and “procure land and

industry for the poor classes” (Sanders 2004:287). Yet, once the land and titles promised by their involvement in the liberal revolts of mid-nineteenth-century began to vanish, the alliance weakened too.

In the early twentieth century, Conservatives and Liberals began to converge in order to revert and contained the effervescence of popular liberalism, driving peasants and emergent working classes to find refuge in unions and causes mobilized by left-wing political parties and alternatives as *Gaitanismo*.⁴ Yet, these collective actions were not the product of a unified and coordinated movement. In some cases, the political project of peasant grassroots groups “was not beyond the defense to settle in small plots with the guarantee of not being expelled from them” (De Roux 1991:5). In other instances, union efforts sprouted around concerns like the growing proletarianization, urbanization and industrialization of the mid twentieth century. Yet, the escalating *Violencia* of the mid twentieth century shattered for more than a decade these strategies, and with it also the political hopes vanished again in the countryside.

Nortecaucano peasants, as many other rural inhabitants around the country, had to wait till the late 1960s to recover their organizational and bargaining power. Through associations such as *Juntas de Acción Comunal* [JAC, Communal Action Groups] and peasant associations such as ANUC *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* [National Association of Peasant Users], rural populations found new organizational referents that allowed them to reenter the nation’s public political life.

On the one hand, the *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (JAC) were created in towns and neighborhoods of countryside since 1958 in the interest of neutralizing what some perceived as an emergent “union radicalism” and in an attempt to “pacify” rural

communities after the antagonism and conflicts caused by *La Violencia*. First, JAC's competences were centered on infrastructural and educational issues, offering at least on paper greater political accountability and claiming to bridge the gulf between the state and civil society. In some instances this scheme granted *veredas* [hamlets] the possibility to improve their living conditions, as happened with the school and road around the town of Guachené. As Don Alberto, a senior resident and former cacao grower recalled, he and other members of the *vereda* did take part in the conformation of the first Communal Action Groups in the area. "That was in the late 1950s or so," he said. "We received *capacitaciones en acción comunal* [training in communal action], and were able to push for the improvement of roads and helped to build the first *escuela*," said Don Alberto proudly.

On the other hand, after the struggles brought about by the expansion of the sugarcane industry and agricultural development projects, rural people in *Norte del Cauca*, together with other groups around the country passed to a more radical stance. According to Don Alberto, the JAC soon became a site for clientelism: "that is why I dedicated more to the ANUC [National Association of Peasant Users], because as user they helped me with a small plot and agricultural inputs and supplies." Indeed, in the late 1960s, rural inhabitants began pushing an agrarian reform through land occupations and participation in the acronym ANUC that Don Alberto mentioned in his narrative (Escobar 1987). Both, a land reform agency and a peasant organization, ANUC appeared in 1967 influenced by the hemispheric policy *Alliance for Progress* (1961), which pressured participatory projects and endorsed a limited version of agrarian reforms all over Latin America (Zamosc 1986:35).

While ANUC was constituted by presidential decree in an attempt to control peasant land mobilizations, soon dissident factions encouraged autonomy from the state promoting land occupations and more radical political projects. “There was a *linea* [branch] related to the Government, called the ANUC from Armenia, that was the official one, and there was another independent *linea*, the left ANUC also known as Sincelejo, we had both here,” said Don Alberto. These divisions were stimulated by indigenous mobilizations around the goal of recuperating communal territories, which not only managed to confront the homogenous citizenship conception of the nation, but also challenged the limitations of leftist political theory questions, stuck in the language of class struggle (Mallon 1994, Findji 1991, Gros 2000).

In 1970s, allied with indigenous groups that were about to be instrumental in the foundation of CRIC [Cauca Regional Indigenous Council], rural settlers of *Norte del Cauca* joined the short-lived slogan of popular liberalism *La tierra es para quién la trabaja* [the land is for the one who works it] (Troyan 2015:178). Through committees organized along towns in *Norte del Cauca* (e.g. Puerto Tejada, Padilla, Guachené and Santander de Quilichao) peasants were trained on their rights to land, denouncing *terrajés* [the payment of lands in kind or in exchange for work] and managing in some cases to obtain resources to acquire plots from former *haciendas*. In this regard, Don Alberto remembered:

“*En las luchas por la tierra* [in the struggles for land] we participated with indigenous people. For instance, with the CRIC, which was quite strong. At that time, we had many links, they invited us to congresses and everything, they also participated with us in the ANUC,” said Don Alberto handing me the surviving page of an old *cartilla*

[primer] distributed by ANUC. “There are many experiences of *haciendas* being recovered. Due to the *monstruo de la caña* [the sugarcane fields are referred as a monster] we were not as successful as in other parts of the country, but thank God because otherwise there would have been lots of dead people. Even though we also had *recuperaciones* [land occupations] here,” said Don Alberto stating later that the *recuperaciones* were not land invasions because the land had belonged to their ancestors.

As the elder recalled, in fact through these alliances *haciendas* such as La Eugenia in the village of San Rafael, in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao, was acquired, as well as 65 hectares from the *hacienda* García Bajo in Padilla, and 500 hectares of the *hacienda* of López Adentro (De Roux 1991:16, Moreno 2005:11). INCORA, the state agrarian reform agency, started also addressing demands in areas of extreme resource conflict like the banana plantations on the Atlantic coast or the oil explorations in Magdalena Medio or Casanera. In *Norte del Cauca*, INCORA also awarded in the 1980s lands to an alliance of black peasants and Paéz indigenous groups that occupied 3000 unproductive hectares of the *hacienda* Pílamó located in the municipality of Caloto (Hurtado 2001:27). These lands were awarded in the modality of mixed ownership: one communal for the indigenous claimants and the other by independent parcels, reproducing thus differential patterns of ownership. In the following decades, Pílamó black residents would struggle to avail themselves the possibility of constituting inexhaustible and inalienable collective titles too.

It was also then when some black peasants first realized that class-based claims were not the only way to recover land: “I was not a fan of communism,” continued Don Alberto, “but I understood very well that indigenous groups then, as now, had internal

divisions,” said the elder referring to the leftist disputes within the indigenous movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s that considered ethnic discourses as an impediment to class-based mobilizations.⁵ “Some were willing to stand together with us, as happened with CRIC, but others simply had their own forms of organization,” Don Alberto said.

Many members of ANUC and also militant intellectuals who supported the indigenous movement during those years, some of them anthropologists and social scientists, added indeed to an orthodox Marxism that disregarded the complex workings of ethnicity, gender, race, and the more uncertain rights of nature, place and territory. However, there were also members, especially indigenous leaders, who anticipated in many aspects the role of postcolonial criticism reexamining very early the orthodox Marxist vocabulary (Caviedes 2002).

Yet, participation in such peasant associations was also harshly repressed with evictions, secret services, and paramilitary forces (Escobar 1987, De Roux 2001). According to Don Alberto, it was precisely then, when the *ingenios* lashed out more strongly: “People were really scared at that time. There were lots of ghost stories circulating. My spouse and sons, for instance, were afraid of going into the crops, of course they were only little children, but *les habían metido miedo con un montón de monstruos* [they had terrified them with lots of monsters], *para que la gente le cogiera miedo a las tierras* [so people lost interest in the land],” said Don Alberto. “At the same time, important *usuarios campesinos* and leftist leaders were killed. When I went to the meetings, I did it most of the time in secrecy, hiding. So, I guess that fear of being murdered contained the movement here in flatlands. Finally, those who did not sell their plots ended up leasing, because they were told that cane was a securer income,” he added.

According to De Roux, in this conflicting scenery the sale or lease of plots was seen as a possibility of improving their income and obtaining urban goods or new jobs generated by the sugarcane industry (De Roux 2001:151-152). At his point the farms that black peasants had been working for several centuries, already exhibited signs of destabilization due to both diseases and the pressure of “technified” agricultural systems and modified seeds. Especially, from the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence of modern agricultural entrepreneurs who began to exert pressure on the land in search of lease or purchase took advantage of the crisis in the production of small cacao growers, which two decades ago accounted for some 40 percent of all cacao produced in the country (De Roux 1991:40). “My wife at that time worked in everything that had to do with the sun,” Don Alberto said referring to outside labors, “after we sold most part of our farm, she started working *requisando* [harvesting] soya and weeding maize, but then those fields were suddenly transformed into sugarcane,” he said. Since only few women managed to become cane workers, and usually with way more labor precarity than men, Don Alberto’s wife had to travel each time longer distances to find a *jornal*, but eventually found herself unemployed.⁶

By 1975 ANUC was expelled from the Ministry of Agriculture and any trace of state policy related to land reforms were replaced by a series of policies that opened the way for a so-called agrarian counter-reform.⁷ The agrarian reform policy promoted by Lleras Restrepo was transformed into “an instrument of defense of the landowner’s interests, support for capitalist agriculture, and the curbing of peasant aspirations” (Zamosc 1986:97). This was complemented by the issuance of the Security Statute in 1978, at the beginning of the government of Julio César Turbay Ayala. The Statute was

used to persecute not only peasant organizations, but also political, union, indigenous, magisterial and student organizations.⁸

But not all struggles and political expressions were linked to land disputes. In the 1970s and 1980s, residents of the urban areas such as Villarica, Guachené and Puerto Tejada put forward issues like housing, public services and environmental impacts caused by the expanding sugar cane industry. Unlike the peasant populations of the upper Cauca around Mindala, Suárez or La Toma, most of the participants of these civil protests had in common urban experiences, which included sometimes high school and university degrees, as well as a trajectory of participation in civic committees and development programs led by action-research initiatives and non-governmental organizations (Hurtado 2001:101-110).

Among such programs, residents of Villarica, just a few miles northwest from Don Alberto's house, recalled especially EMCODES (Cooperation for Development Company), which operated with international funding under the leadership of progressive academics from the Universidad del Valle, as Gustavo de Roux and Mary Judith Vásquez.

"Look, in Padilla, Puerto Tejada and Villarica, EMCODES helped us. I learned a lot with the programs they brought here. Before we have had professors here from Cali and Bogotá, they were very serious with what was happening with the land and the *ingenios*," said an articulated seventy-year-old woman from Villarica who had served as schoolteacher since the late 1980s. "The politician Navarro Wolf, which later turned to the guerilla [M-19], lived here for a while, and also an anthropologist [Nina S. Friedmann] did a documentary about our problems. But EMCODES brought something

new. They were helping people not only with education and political organizing, but also with resources and productive projects,” the woman added.

As an action-research program, EMCODES was intended to strengthening processes that were already underway by providing both information to support collective bargaining efforts and also building capacities for small productive projects. In the case of Villarica the intervention had to do with the irregularities in the administration of the local electricity service that had awakened people’s indignation and discontent (De Roux 1991:38). The then social activists and scholar Gustavo De Roux, described the situation as follows:

The situation was dramatic in many small communities of the region because the electric company, as a result of the crisis, also stopped underwriting the cost of installing power lines and transformers. Thus the inhabitants of these communities had to assume the overall cost of installation, including putting up power lines over distances of five kilometers or more. The Agrarian Bank (*Caja de Crédito Agrario*) agreed to extend loans to the peasants so that they would be able to assume these costs. Purchasing equipment with borrowed capital led to being faced with loan amortization and interest payments, all of which added to the already high cost of electricity. If to this we also add the debts that many semi-proletarian peasants already had incurred with the Agrarian Bank for production loans for farms affected by the expansion of the sugar cane plantations, we see a clearly risky and indeed dangerous situation. The peasants could have easily found themselves forced to sell off their lands at an accelerated pace (De Roux 1991:41-42, my translation).

Organizations known as *Comites de Usuarios de Servicios Públicos* [Public Service Users Committees] that demanded better quality and continuity in the service in Villarica were thus empowered by these action-research programs. Soon, this experience of the “Public Service Users Committee” helped to develop similar initiatives in at least 15 other towns and *veredas* of *Norte Del Cauca* (De Roux 1991b:17).

In the case of Puerto Tejada, the priorities had to do with housing shortage. Agro-industrial activity had attracted immigrants from other areas of the country, especially

from municipalities around Cauca and Nariño, as well as from the Pacific coast. But correspondingly, the sugarcane *ingenios* demanded more and more land, thus restricting the growth of urban centers and generating overcrowding and overpopulation. As De Roux (1991b) and Hurtado (2000) have argued, this situation would cause in the 1980s the emergence of the association of *destechados* [unroofed] that demanded from the government and local authorities the acquisition of lands owned by the mills to solve their housing problem.⁹ As it had happened before in the 1920s with *terrazgueros* and emergent workers unions (see chapter 4), urban inhabitants substantiated their claims arguing a long history of violent expropriation from their peasants lands and the illegal appropriation of common lands by private interests. Yet, encouraged by the generalized civic protests in the region people also sought to solve the problem on their own terms:

On March 21, 1981, almost 1,500 families representing about 20% of the total population of Puerto Tejada invaded a farm belonging to the *Ingenio* La Cabaña and resisted the attempts of eviction directed by the public force (De Roux 1991b:15-16).

As the sociologist Teodora Hurtado has argued, despite the risks and obstacles that these civic and popular movements confronted, the population of northern Cauca began in these decades to articulate around common problems (Hurtado 2000:39). This would result in the strengthening of bargaining power and the expansion of different popular and political organizations. An important landmark in these processes was set in 1984 by *La Red de Organizaciones de base* [Network of grassroots organizations], which attempted to bring together under a single social movement, separate regional concerns. As some of the banners drawn in the cover of the first musical long play recorder by the *Red* express it (See Figure 31), the movement revolved around issues of popular politics, underrepresentation of local communities in the municipal governments, public services,

housing, wages and environmental concerns. Yet, these concerns did not emerge on their own as separate issues. On the contrary, the Network attempted to raise awareness of the distinctive racialized historical ground on which they were rooted. The legend contained in the back Cover of the long play express this with the figure of Sinecio Mina:

When, in 1917, José Ignacio Mina, known as Sinecio Mina, died in Puerto Tejada, no one imagined that over the years the freedom that the blacks had been forging for a while would be compromised again. For Sinecio, as for many descendants of former slaves, it was the link to the land that was necessary to occupy and defend to become truly free. That is why when the landowners took on the task of evicting black peasants from the farms that they had turned into fertile cacao plantations, men like Sinecio contributed to organize the defense of freedom. The libertarian spirit of the black population of northern Cauca and Sur del Valle did not die with Sinecio. In recent years, several social and popular movements have emerged in the region based on the protest of people who do not resign themselves to witnessing the decline of their well-being or the curtailment of their rights and freedoms. Some of these movements have arisen as an expression of civic, unions, housing, ecological, cultural groups, etc., organized to respond to concrete necessities and by considering the importance of supporting each other, through a Network of Grassroots Organizations. [...] (Back Cover of the long play recorded by *La Red de Organizaciones de base* [Network of grassroots organizations] in 1984).

With such strategies, similar to protest songs in other parts of Latin America, the *Red* aimed to communicate the political hopes and “deep feelings” behind a unified social movement in *Norte del Cauca*. Through songs composed by collective creation in gatherings and meetings the *Red* transmitted its messages. For instance, one of the lyrics argued that *la tierra de nuestros padres los ingenios las cambiaron por un salario de hambre y con hambre nos dejaron* [the land of our fathers was changed by the sugarcane mills for a salary of hunger, and with hunger they left us]. Another demanded to say *Chao Chao* [bye, bye] to Chaux, a Popayán politician who was seen as the personification of bureaucracy and *politiquería* [politicking or bad politics].



Figure 31. Cover of the first Long play recorded by *La Red de Organizaciones de base* [Network of grassroots organizations] in 1984. Courtesy of La Direkta and of the Ethnographic Laboratory from Icesi University.

Other lyrics insisted on the right to a clean environment asking why in Caloto “the birds did not sing but cough.” One particularly song, *Reclamo negro* [black demand], that became popular among nortecaucanos residents, expressed in the following terms the long history of the region:

(...) si escarbaron las entrañas de la tierra, si esculcaron el lecho de los ríos, y entregaron toneladas de oro, entonces por qué están olvidados?
Si cultivaron extensas plantaciones e hicieron brotar de los trapiches las mieles que endulzan la existencia entonces por qué están olvidados? Si los negros trajeron la alegría, el goce, la emoción y el movimiento, si pusieron el picante de la vida y enseñaron el valor del sentimiento, sin los negros la

(...) if they dug into the bowels of the earth, if they searched the riverbeds, and gave tons of gold, then why are they forgotten?
If they cultivated extensive plantations and sprout from the sugar mills the molasses that sweeten existence, why are they forgotten? If the blacks brought happiness, enjoyment, emotion and movement, if they put the spice to life and taught the value of feeling, without blacks life is just a song

<p>vida es sólo un canto sin ritmo, sin risa y sin encanto. Si sus labios cantaron la esperanza y sus brazos forjaron la riqueza que impulsa el progreso de la patria entonces porque están olvidados. Si desde tiempo de bravos cimarrones vienen luchando por romper cadenas y construir la palabra libertad entonces por qué están olvidados? [...] (RED 1984 Reclamo negro)</p>	<p>without rhythm, without laughter and without charm. If their lips sang hope and their arms forged the wealth that drives the progress of the country, then why are they forgotten? If from the time of brave Maroons they struggled to break the chains and build the word freedom, then why are they forgotten? [...] (Red 1984 Reclamo negro, my translation)</p>
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Through the verses of this “*reclamo negro*” an argument stood out. The nation and its resources were possible and valuable not precisely by natural or preexisting condition, but because black “lips sang hope and their arms forged the wealth that drives the progress of the country.” The references to the involvement of enslaveds in the creation of a prosperous nation of “free people” through their labor and struggles for rights was a clear message to what they perceived as an exclusionary republic. But the “popular force” that the *Red* attempted to mobilize went beyond racial discrimination issues. A peasant interviewed in 1986 by Gustavo De Roux in the *vereda* La Balsa, in Buenos Aires defined the *Red* as threads of communication, solidarity and work, where each group acted as a knot, and the gaps between knots represented the independence and autonomy of each group (De Roux 1991b:18). Hence, regardless of its objectives, any group could be part of the network as long as it also directed its efforts to the solution of common problems. By 1985, more than 25 groups from 15 different communities were part of the Network (De Roux 1991b:19).

Despite the organizational achievements made by these civic protests, the movement and its leaders couldn't consolidate their aspirations to public office. In the late-twentieth century the civic and popular movements that have been growing in Norte del Cauca, were soon shattered by a confluence of dynamics. At least two of these must be considered in detail.

First, their candidates' independent proposals did not receive the expected popular support. By enforcing relations of patronage and clientelism regional economic and political elites managed to keep out of the municipal administration the grassroots organizations and their leaders (Hurtado 2000:40). Moreover, according to de Roux, who was an advocate of the movement, the sympathies of most nortecaucanos were still too tied to the Liberal Party (De Roux 1991). In the process of state decentralization initiated since the mid-1980s, some of the popular leaders and organizations strategically allied with traditional parties or with electoral organizations. The intention was to take advantage of the devolution of resources, responsibilities, and decision-making authority to local governments.¹⁰ While this process granted some leaders space for maneuvering around the provisions of services in education, health, water, sanitation, roads, and agricultural extension among others, it also confined them within the lines of the Liberal Party which prevail again in the region between 1985 and 2004.

Second, in the timelines drawn by leaders in collective workshops, the shadow of drug trafficking and paramilitaries appears as a thick red line, which carried selected deaths and penetrated local politics (See Figure 32).¹¹ Some research participants associated these forces and interests with the emergence of street gangs and urban violence. For others, along with the coca and marihuana fields, which appeared in the

country hill, came the guerrilla, private forces, and the Colombian state army placing people in crossfire.

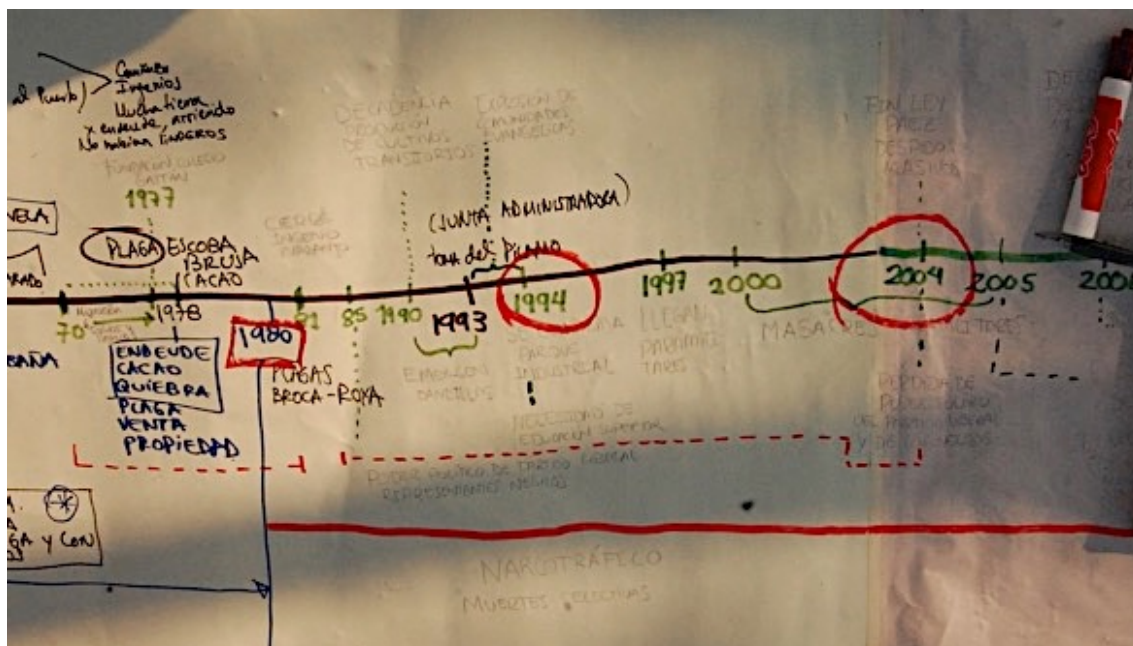


Figure 32. Timeline drawn by research participants in the flatlands. People were asked to remember important historical events and plot them on timeline. See footnote 11 for a metodological discussion. Courtesy of Inge Helena Valencia. The workshop took place during an “action-research” program named *Herramientas par a la Autonomía Territorial* [Tools for Territorial Autonomy], see note 2 in Introduction.

For instance, the CRIC and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN), that had continued struggling to recover lands through legal ways and direct occupations since the 1970s, suffered in 1991 a mayor lost when paramilitary groups allied with police forces massacred 21 Nasa indigenous people. The group was murdered as they were reclaiming possession of 500 hectares of the *hacienda El Nilo* in the foothills of Caloto, in the southeast corner of the Valley. “We lost many people in order to reclaim this finca,” said a former Nasa governor; lands where their elders had told them that they had lived before elites from the Valley evicted everyone who had

refused to leave for the mountains:

The narco-traffickers, the land-owners, and the police were all involved. Now they call themselves the Black Eagles or Rastrojos, but they're just the same people. When we pressure the government to fulfill its promises to return our land the intimidation increases. Three months ago we had paramilitaries passing along the road in front of the *resguardo* shouting threats against the current governor. They said they were from the Rastrojos but the name is not important (quoted in Llewellyn 2005).

Pointing to the mountains that connect Caloto with Corinto, a resident from Guachené described the zone as a drug route: “Those hills were untouchable for the *ejército* [army] a few years ago. When Alvaro Uribe was president [2002-2010] it was practice to accuse ACIN, CRIC, and even the *concejos comunitarios*, of being accessories to guerrillas and criminality.” These dynamics of accusations recalled the image of “devils” and “deviant” others that agricultural development elites had enforced since the beginning of the twentieth century (See Chapter 3).

To the other corner of the Valley, in the southwest, the mountainous territory connected the Andean zones with the country's Pacific coast through an intricate river cross-terrain. In the eyes of the State's armed forces, there is a dispute that points to the zone as a strategic corridor for the shipment of narcotics towards an international market. According to the official data, the introduction and subsequent expansion of illegal crops in the region provided an entry point for the armed conflict. Some analysts assert that the conflict's escalation started in the year 2000, with the implementation of fumigation and eradication campaigns in the Putumayo region under “Plan Colombia;” which would in turn help to explain the spatial reorganization of the conflict, the changes in strategies, and the actions carried out by armed groups (CODHES 2003). Here, just as what happened in the 1991 Nilo massacre, the Colombian government ignored repeated

warnings by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights about a possible upcoming paramilitary incursions. In 2001, on the opposite side of the mountains of Suárez and Buenos Aires, 500 men of the paramilitary organization Self -Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)¹² murdered at least 40 people and forced the displacement of another 3,000 in the Naya region.

For some community members the reasons that turned the region into a new focus point for illegal cultivation goes beyond the aforementioned geostrategic characteristics. The environmental damage caused by agricultural and infrastructural developments (e.g. the Salvajina Dam and lake that will be explain in detail in the following section) and the difficult socio-economic conditions that the country experienced in the mid-1990s (worsened by precarious commercial routes and the lack of State support to develop alternative production projects) made the region a vulnerable and apt place for illegal crop cultivation to become a risky, but yet effective way to procure an income. In the eyes of some residents, the State's scarce or nil presence, coupled with geographic isolation of some *veredas*, allowed a series of activities inherent to drug-trafficking, illegal mining, and its commodity chains to flourish. These activities ranged from the insurgent and paramilitary groups in search of financial resources, to a legal economy that benefited from the technologies and investments that entered the region. Despite the fact that data produced by the Integrated System for Monitoring Illicit Crops (SIMCI), showed that the total hectares designated towards coca cultivation in Suárez were still relatively low in relation to the rest of the country, from the mid-2000s the dynamics promoted by drug-trafficking have begun to exert pressure on peasant practices (SIMCI 2012). As farmer in the hills of the municipality of Suárez once told me, while

conducting a local census for the community council: “I used to ask the guerrilla commandants that passed through here, how they thought that the revolution was going to take place with all the money that was coming in through drug trafficking. People don’t revolt when they have a full belly.”

For some academics looking specially at the Pacific region, the construction of these ‘geographies of terror’ (Oslender 2008), seek to revert accomplishments gained by social movements and aims towards a forceful insertion into a nation-building project (Restrepo, 2005). Thus, Colombia’s countryside faces not the collateral effects of an on-going conflict, but rather the forces of new colonization efforts; this time hardly celebrated by historic recounts as an example of entrepreneurship or progress. Rather explicitly aimed at the establishment of a counter agrarian reform, promoted by interest groups involved in the control and accumulation of land for resource extraction (licit or illicit). Although guerrillas have been operating in the area since 1970s, the arrival of paramilitary groups in 2000s, and the increase of regional militarization, has been associated with foreign investment and the expansion of privatization processes and industrial interests. Still, as I will argue in the next section, the start-up of one of the most far-reaching infrastructural developments in the region would also offer grassroots organizations a further and perhaps an even more significant reconfiguration of the political.

‘Salvaje Salvajina’

If in the flatlands of *Norte del Cauca* black and indigenous groups aligned in the 1970s with the cause of social rights of peasants to land and around civic demands related to

public services and the impacts caused by the expanding sugar cane industry, in the country hill around the towns of Mindala, Suárez and La Toma, an important moment for community organizing took place around the Salvajina dam construction between 1979 and 1985.¹³ The dam reconnected once again the old colonial mining areas of Gelima with the flat areas of the valley, this time not for the benefit of the mine-hacienda complex, but for the benefit of the buoyant agricultural development in the valley.

“Cuando encharcaron el río [When they flooded the river], that brought together not only indigenous and black communities, but also people from diverse productive sectors,” said Faviola, the community council representative of Mindalá that I had accompanied to gather census data and oral histories around mining practices (see Chapter 1). While conducting interviews with Faviola, I once asked her why was she doing this job, which put more pressure on her already busy days and brought little economic reward. Pointing with her mouth at the reservoir that now covers the land and riverbed that used to feed her family, she said: “My mother couldn’t do much more at the time. She didn’t think that the whole thing was possible; I mean that they could build a lake over our house by the river, but they did. Now to prevent worst things, we need to substantiate our right to prior consultation and constitutional protection as afro-descendent groups,” she affirmed.

Yet, when a white upper middle class Colombian asks these kinds of questions people also know that something else could be implied: “Someone might think that because my skin is not that brown I cannot work for this process,” said Faviola narrowing her eyes with certain suspicion. “I am sure some people look at me that way, but you need to know that this is not about skin color, this is about history,” she was quick to add

in our way to a group interview in the mountains of Mindalá.

That morning Faviola had managed to gather in a small *rancho* [shack] in the *vereda* of Tamboral, four miners and farmers. Of the nine *veredas* that form the *corregimiento* of Mindala, Tamboral together with Maraveles specialize in lode mining. The house, with its dirt floor, red clay, bamboo structural frame and zinc tin roof, was of a wattle-and-daub design repeated on smallholdings throughout the area.¹⁴ The kitchen was literally and completely the living and sleeping room. Fernando, the owner, had plans to upgrade and expand to another room, but that is “if the mine provides,” he said while offering us to take a sit in a wooden bench. For now his wife and sons still live uphill in Pueblo Nuevo where they keep a coffee farm. Depending on the demands of work and the season, he rotates between the two sites, sometimes spending a week in agricultural tasks, others remaining in the mine and working in his *mejora* [the house is referred to as an improvement to the land]. But his intentions are to relocate his whole family to the new site that is closer to the road. “Living up there is not viable any more, we moved up there because of the hydroelectric dam and lake, but from here to there is about two hours walking and if you have to carry food or stuff, it is even longer. Thank god I was able to built this *mejora*,” he said.

Vicente, the youngest of the four participants, concurs. Dressed in jeans and rubber boots he overlaps Fernando’s words: “Even using the road the town is still too far. Before we had *trochas* [trails] that were better connected.” Since he was twelve, he helped his father taking their coffee harvest to town. They loaded two horses with sacks and on top managed to tie *racimos* [raceme or bunch] of plantains too. “We sold everything at good prices, but now with the long travels and the loading and unloading on

the ferry you are lucky if they offer you something. The load of plantains usually reaches the market completely burned,” he said. Vicente remembered also that when he was twelve, in 1977, he saw a car for the first time. Laying the ground for the construction of the dam, the CVC was expanding the road that had been laid out by the Asnazú Gold Dredging Company around the 1930s, and for the first time many residents of the area were seeing a parade of trucks and vehicles of all sorts.

Don Argemiro, the eldest of the group, considered himself a local historian and as such, was well used to interviews. “*Venga pero comencemos por el principio* [let’s start by the beginning]. I remember the days of the dam’s construction very well,” said Don Argemiro motivated by Vicente’s recollections. “They began buying land in the late 1970s. The first sellers were able to negotiate, but after people were paid very little in comparison to what lands were worth,” he said talking slowly and calm. “If you consider that people had planted corn, plantains, yucca, and beans, and that if they needed anything else there were the mine or the river to pan, you have to agree with me that they bought those lands *a precio de huevo* [at the price of an egg],” he said now emphatically. According to an interview with a CVC public servant, a Colombian researcher found out recently that the institute in charge of the evaluation process hardly took into account the agricultural use of the land, disregarding other productive and dwelling practices related to mining, fishing, hunting or commerce (Vélez 2012: 439-440). Don Argemiro confirmed this information arguing that even the agricultural value was unevaluated: “Those lands were so fertile that you didn’t need to do anything else but sowing, cleaning, and harvesting. Imagine that there were coffee plants about 40 or 50 years old and they were still giving coffee. You don’t see plants like those on these days anymore,”

Don Argemiro said.

“If we have been united at that time that wouldn’t have happened.” Faviola replied as if her words were a mandate that she needed to remind herself daily.

“Yes,” said Don Argemiro, “but when people started selling, the rest did not have any other choice. The CVC began buying by parts; some plots here in Tamboral, some in Vista Hermosa. Then they went to San Vicente or to El Arenal. So, lots of people were left in the middle,” the old man explained.

In 1979 when the CVC began proper construction of the wall, Don Argemiro realized that they had no escape: “it was either to sell or to stay to drown,” he remembered. “And if someone did not want to sell, they deposited money in a bank and that was it. But those were the lucky ones, others simply got water in return,” said Don Argemiro ironically referring to the inhabitants that barely had time to move when the water level began to rise.

“That day, in January 1985, it was like a Friday or Saturday, people began to have problems going down to the market, because the water was already on the *camino real* [colonial royal trail]. People were trying to take their coffee out, they had their beasts loaded but the trail wasn’t there anymore,” Don Argemiro recalled. Faviola agreed recalling that her family had their mules and horses on the other side when the water began rising quickly: “we had to use a canoe to move them back to this side,” she said. “My uncle’s molino [mill] was still grinding gold when that happened.”

The man-made lake stirred ambivalent emotions to Susana, the only woman in the group besides Faviola: “It is difficult to believe that this beautiful landscape has so many sad stories,” she said looking at the single ferry that now crosses the reservoir.

“Excursions came up here from schools in the city, they came to show children how their energy was produced, but I bet they neglected talking about the effects of the dam,” said Susana. “Today we still lack electrification in many parts. And when you finally get connected, after paying with your own money for the poles and wire and laying them with our own work, you only have the service for a few hours,” Susana remarked.

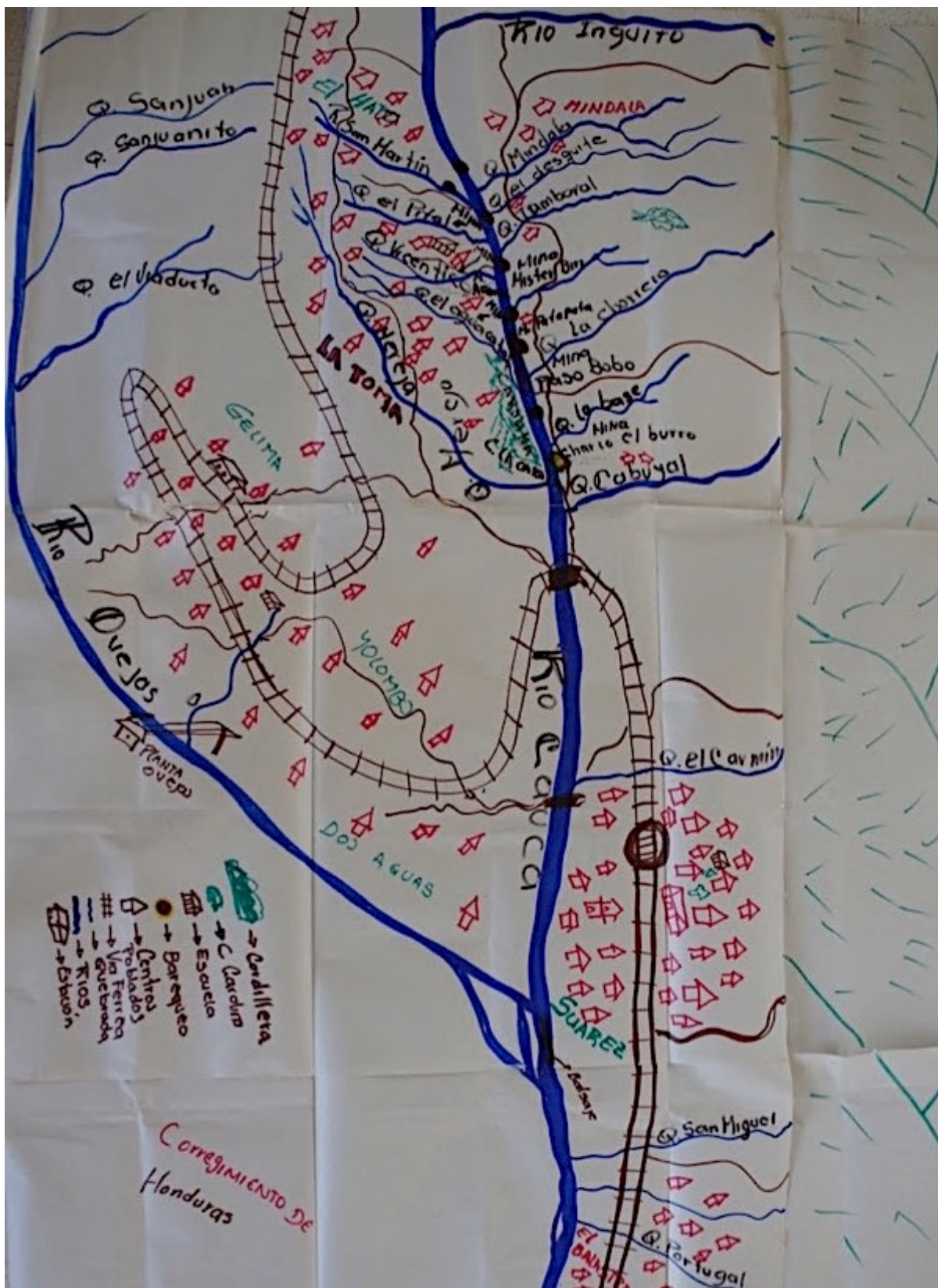
When she was ten, she had to give up her education, because her school in the *vereda* Cajones was flooded. Her parents tried to demand for a relocation of the school through the *Junta de Acción Comunal*, but given the delays in response by the government, some teachers ended up using regular houses for the classes. Since attending to farther schools cost more money than her parents could afford, the simpler option for her was to learn to pan for gold with her mother during the farming off-season. “But that ended with the lake too, I don’t deny that I like the view. Some people are taking advantage of the tourist opportunities, but I preferred the sense of independence that the river gave me with its gold and fertile lands,” she said.

Before the CVC began buying farms and pressuring people to leave their plots, at the end of 1970s, the residents of Mindalá, Suárez and La Toma among other nearby *corregimientos*, depended for subsistence on a complementary system of rotation between agriculture, hunting, small-scale fishing and mining. This latter activity occurred mostly in riverine gold bearing gravels and loose sands (see Chapter 1). But occasionally miners also engaged in ground sluicing and lode mining in the mountains, especially when waterworks and cooperation so allowed. As can be observed in the participatory map produced by leaders of the area (see Map 14), in the early-twentieth century the settlements along the Cauca River and its many tributaries were predominant. There,

people found not only fertile and flatter lands for agriculture, but also *placeros* apt for *barequeros* [gold panners]. Residents also took advantage of the railroad to sell their coffee and other products in the region's markets.

In the official narratives of progress raised by the CVC in their commemorative books the silences and erasures of the conflicts and dislocations caused by the project are the predominant note.¹⁵ In many instances, the celebratory tenor of their infrastructural achievements and their conservation practices are predicated on the removal, both material and symbolically, of the livelihoods of local peasants and miners, which still don't see the benefits of such development.¹⁶ For Don Argemiro, the Salvajina Dam was an organizational awakening: "We should have acted before, but nobody believed that someone could block the river. I even thought that the force of the water alone was going to solve our problems knocking down the wall. But when the flooding began we realized the truth and founded ASOPRODASA (the Association of People Affected by the Salvajina Dam)," said Argemiro (see Figure 33).

As happened with the ANUC in the 1970s, the association of people affected by the Salvajina Dam quickly found support in the indigenous regional council (CRIC), and in the civic and popular movements articulated by *La Red de Organizaciones de Base*. Together these actors and social movements organized in 1986 a march to Popayán demanding negotiation with the CVC to find a solution to their problems. "In the highlands to the south there are indigenous *resguardos* and they also were affected," said Argemiro.



Map 14. Participatory map developed by members of the black community councils of the area. People were asked to draw places and settlements circa 1950 when the railroad was still in service and before the construction of the dam. Places named in the text can be identified here. The workshop took place during an “action-research” program named *Herramientas par a la Autonomía Territorial* [Tools for Territorial Autonomy], see note 2 in Introduction.



Figure 33. Above, the upper Cauca River before the construction of the Salvajina Dam circa 1970s. Middle, construction works circa 1985. Source: CVC archive courtesy of Axel Rojas. Below, present day reservoir and lake as seen from the western cordillera. Photograph by the author.

Indeed, the forceful construction of the Dam also affected *Nasa* indigenous communities, adding to the 1970s protests another motive to keep struggling over lands and rights. “So, *la marcha* [the protest] unified *las etnias* [the ethnic groups], but also brought support from the *compañeros* [literaly partners, but indicating also solidarity in organized struggles] in the flatlands that encouraged us to insist on access to our lands and mining sites. Only then, when the government and the CVC saw us strong and united, blocking the Pan American highway and reaching Popayán, they finally were willing to listen to us,” he explained. “In that year, we even managed to have a song named ‘Salvaje Salvajina,’ thanks to these alliances.” The song indeed appeared in the second volume recorded by the *Red de Organizaciones de Base* in 1986.

Besides the civic protest over public and housing services in the flatlands, close to Padilla residents were also experiencing the consequences of the flooding control program implemented by the CVC. There, peasant plots were affected by the construction of an embankment and levee on one of the sides of La Paila River. The works protected the sugarcane fields, but also prevented the floodplains from performing its functions, thus transferring the problem further downstream towards the peasant farms. The inhabitants, demanded CVC’s intervention in a way that was going to be instrumental for the association of people affected by the Salvajina Dam: “We think it is time for the CVC to stop being an instrument of powerful *gremios* [guilds] and to start acting impartially for the benefit of the entire community,” asserted Padilla residents (quoted in De Roux 1991b:19).

Organized as a cooperative of miners, inhabitants of Mindalá also fought for compensations as Roberto and Aurora had told me when I stopped to visit them in one of

my first interviews: “They promised us routes to new mining sites and equipment and technical assistance,” both remembered. “They even offered us the campground where the CVC had their offices and workshops while the construction took place, but we only obtained these terrains here in Tamboral,” said the couple that identify themselves as “Agro-miners.” The Cooperative asked insistently for reparations, calculating their losses at an average of one gram of gold by miner daily to restore their previous degree of economic autonomy.

After five days of mobilization ASOPRODASA reached finally an agreement with the government, the CVC and local authorities. “We obtained the *planchones* [ferries], because before we were trapped. They had some motorboats but they were risky, people had many accidents,” commented Argemiro.

“The thing is that we are still constrained by a single schedule,” said Fernando standing on the doorframe. “The *planchón* goes upstream at seven in the morning and then returns at three in the afternoon, and that’s it. Imagine having a medical emergency here,” he concluded dramatically. The improvement of the road, or the bridges and paths promised in the agreements of 1986, are “nowhere to be seen,” sentenced Fernando.

“Nor the schools,” added Susana. “According to the agreement they were supposed to build twenty five *escuelas* and four *colegios*, and guarantee the staff and professors to run them, but I am still waiting to see the fulfillment of those promises.”

Yet, the wall did not contain Salvajina’s social problems and controversies. They were also transferred further downstream. For the group of farmers and miners, the breaches of the agreement forced the displacement of many people to the outskirts of cities such as Cali. “There are entire colonies living in the district of Aguablanca [in

Cali],” said Susana. “You can find neighborhoods called after Suárez and La Toma,” said Susana. What is ironic is that those who were forced to move, estimated by a local historian around 5.500 (Juanillo 2008:28), were called later *invasores* [invaders] when they occupied quarters in the district of Aguablanca. While the Dam was being devised upstream, in the eastern periphery of Cali, the Cauca River was also channeled by a *jarillón* [embankment and levee] of 17 kilometers long and 60 meters wide that conquered lands previously subject to floods.¹⁷ People displaced from the countryside by agricultural development and the violence associated to it, rapidly settled here finding in those fertile riverbanks what they believe to be a sort of compensation for their loss. Today the same institution that was responsible for the construction of the dam is now claiming that those neighborhoods that occupy the embankment and levee, place the city of Cali at risk of a possible “Katrina” (El País 2016).

In addition to the forced displacement, the social relations and bonds forged by generations between the two sides of the river were severely damaged. As explained by Faviola and Bertha, in our initial conversations around mining techniques, the flooding of the river generated an enormous distance between families and friends to the point that nowadays “you have to separate at least two days to reach places that we used to reach in two hours on horseback,” remembered Faviola.

Walking around the reservoir and hiking across the patchwork of *veredas*, in which residents of the area resettled after the flooding, I was constantly told that there was a world of difference, between the river “as a way of life,” and the perspective of regional elites, which had seen the current of the river mainly as a source of potentially exploitable energy or as means to the industrialization of the agriculture of the valley. Far from being something chaotic and in need to be contained, straighten, and controlled to

generate “development,” the Cauca River with its sands, marshes, and meanderings was indeed to many *nortecaucanos* a living space with its own logic.¹⁸ As it will be clear in the next section, these demands and disputes over land, livelihoods, and dwelling practices would laid the ground for a territorial discourse and a sense of place that would merge symbolic and material claims in the distinctive mixture of “ancestral territories.”

‘Enemies of progress’

The very first day that I established my initial contacts and met potential research participants during pre-dissertation fieldwork in 2012, I was told that if I was interested in territorial claims by an organized Community Council of Black Communities, I should opt for *La Toma*, in the northeastern margin of the Salvajina dam and lake, as a fieldsite. Although there were other *concejos* in the area with similar precedence, undeniably, *La Toma*’s strength was more the exception than the norm.¹⁹

“They are the ones which have more experience in defending *el territorio* [territory], they are our example of resistance,” said Faviola prior to a day-long meeting to negotiate a new environmental plan with the company that runs the hydroelectric. “If it wasn’t for them, we might have accepted EPSA’s first plan without demanding our participation or consultation.”

La Toma’s particular “resistance,” as Faviola named it, had however a common background. After the transitory Article 55 of the 1991 Constitution, a strong process of diffusion, which concentrated mainly in the Pacific region, started reaching some of the municipalities of the flat area of northern Cauca. Towns such as Puerto Tejada, Villarica and Santander de Quilichao received the influences of a “pedagogy of alterity,” which

attempted to produce a new consciousness; namely that of belonging to a differentiated ethnic group with close ties between territory, culture and memory. Through word of mouth, leaders and activists spread the idea that “there was a new Law for black people that should be known and applied,” remembered one of the social leaders of that time. After all the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), as a national organization, was born in the Cauca Valley in 1990 after the first encounter of black social organizations in Cali, and was later strengthened in a second meeting in Puerto Tejada in 1993 (Huratdo 2000: 42-43). Through encounters as these, a constant link was established between regional groups from the Pacific and the Atlantic coast and the emergent organizations in northern Cauca.

The workshops and assemblies designed to disseminate the Article’s message, and later the Law 70 of 1993, found echo in the creation of the first ethno-territorial organizations in the region. “This is how, until the mountains of the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires came in 1994 the rumors of territorial rights for black communities,” recognized a miner and member of the *Junta de Acción Comunal* from La Toma, involved in the early process of re-conceptualizing their land claims around the idea of black communities.

In any case, inhabitants’ engagement with this new political figure and its ‘ethnic’ dimension was diverse and went not without contestation. Some *veredas* saw *la titulación colectiva* [collectivization of landholdings], as a threat to their individual mining titles.²⁰ However, two social situations were determinant in the changing of their strategy: first, the attempts of the diversion of the Ovejas River into the dam by the electric companies;

and second, the threat of community's displacement from their lands by local and foreign mining interest.

On the one hand, in 1993, while *La ley 70 de comunidades negras* (Law of Black Communities, Law 70) was being approved by the government, another Law, Ley 99 of 1993, was issued to reform the autonomous corporations such as the CVC. In tune with the sustainable development discourse promoted by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987), and with a process of privatization, strongly pressured by the state's debt and global "structural adjustments" policies, Law 99 relieved the CVC from its electric generation duties. This move had a twofold effect: first, it allowed a certain corporate "greenwashing" for the CVC, and second, it allowed a space for the conformation of another company that could enter the market of Public Utility Services.

As a consequence, CVC built a good will that, to a certain extent, covered up and obscured its links among the production of dispossession and extraction practices in the Cauca Valley. The whole campaign directed towards the *recuperación* [restoration] and *aprovechamiento sostenible* [sustainable benefitting] of biodiversity, advertised on the sing described at the introduction of this chapter, was in this sense a simple palliative. It did not mention anything about the accountability of the corporation to the impacts arising from mono-crop agricultural development and energy extraction. On the contrary, since the late 1990s CVC started promoting environmental management plans, seeking the active participation of indigenous and black communities, while associating small-scale mining and local forestry practices (e.g. the extraction of bamboo for constructions) with social deprivation and environmental degradation. Often portrayed in neo-

Malthusian terms, these sustainable discourses explained environmental degradation, food insecurity, and land conflicts as the “natural” result of population pressure and a merciless environment, instead of exposing the inner workings of broader political and economic forces, which deemed certain populations and places vulnerable.

On the other hand, electric generation duties fell on a new Energy Company (EPSA) created to administer not only the Salvajina dam, but also other hydroelectric projects in the Pacific region. Soon stakeholders took advantage of the neoliberal opening of Colombia’s economy in the 1990s to sell the brand new company to an international alliance, which included a North American private electricity firm located in Houston and a firm from Caracas, Venezuela. Later in 2000 the consortium expanded to include the Spanish multinational Union FENOSA, which acquired more than 60% of the shares.²¹ However, while the assets of the hydroelectric Dam were being coveted in the market of Public Utility Services, the same did not happen with the environmental and social liabilities that the project carried behind.

“When the dam passed from the CVC to the hands of EPSA, no one seemed to remember the *acta de compromisos* that we managed to achieve after the march of 1986,” appealed Faviola. “They began promising us electricity and fixing the road as compensation for the dam, but that was it.” According to her narrative, through these mechanisms EPSA was simply trying to meet the new national regulations that since 1993 required companies to conduct environmental impact assessments and to apply for environmental licenses. Although the Salvajina dam was a preexisting project, it was also required by the new laws to meet these standards or be subject to fines.

“And that is what they did,” said Faviola. “For more than three years EPSA just

paid the fines and when the ministry finally pushed them to comply with the regulations, they contracted with a firm named AMBIOTEC which coopted some presidents of *Juntas de Acción*, but never really cared for doing a proper prior consultation,” she added.

When I asked her what this “prior consultation” would have entailed, Faviola was first tempted to answer in very technical terms invoking the free, prior, and informed consent language introduced by legally binding international instruments like the ILO Convention No.169 (ILO 1989) ratified by the Colombian State since 1991. Nonetheless, after I inquired her about the “social life” behind that strategic move she relaxed: “To be honest, we didn’t understand right away what these rights meant. In that we are grateful to the work of La Toma’ leaders who have dedicated themselves to study everything that is related to the processes of black communities,” she added. “They were the first to see EPSA’s corporate responsibility as a way to dissuade all of us from our real political and cultural rights,” she said.

In 2007, as part of its expansion plans in the southwest of Colombia Union FENOSA, the largest shareholder of EPSA, attempted to increase the production of the Salvajina Dam by diverting the Ovejas River. This was one of the phases already conceived since the 1960s as part of the regional development plan designed by the CVC. In fact, eight years after the conclusion of the works in the Salvajina Dam, EPSA attempted to carry on with this phase. But they were soon forced to discard the project due to the social and environmental impacts found by two different studies; one carried out by organized local leaders and the other by EPSA (Sulé 2006:10, Vélez & Vélez 2012).²²

Union FENOSA tried to justify the revival of the project a decade later by arguing that the diversion of the River was a solution to low water levels of the lake, which especially in time of drought impeded the transportation of people and goods through the reservoir. But for residents, already aware and mobilized by the previous attempt of diversion, this was simply an excuse to hide the company's interest in increasing its energy production. The innumerable *veredas* affected by the Salvajina Dam and lake, had long been denouncing what they perceive as an over-exploitation of the Cauca River. “*A la presa de Salvajina la están ordeñando* [The Salvajina Dam is being milked],” headlined a local newspaper citing the words of a biologist member of the Hydrobiological Resources Studies Group of the University of Cauca (El País 2004). “Before, the flow was regulated to prevent floods, but now it is all about generating energy, they no longer work according to rainy season, so the dam is dry and the communities are isolated,” stated the professional (El País 2004).

In fact, the same year that Union FENOSA acquired EPSA, within the privatization process of the electricity sector, the company bought two other electrification companies in the Atlantic Coast: Electricaribe and Electrocosta, both constituted by the National Government in July of 1998. Since that time, the company was also responsible for the generation, distribution and commercialization of energy in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Panama. This mounting demand for service pressured Union FENOSA to expand its production capacities.

For La Toma residents, the Ovejas River is intimately tied to their presence in the region dating back to the seventeenth century when their ancestors established the gold mines in Gelima, part of the colonial mining district of Caloto (see chapter 1). Using

these claims and their articulation with international non-governmental organizations and national social movements (as the PCN and inter-ethnic alliances as the ones established during the 1986 march), people protested once more against the diversion. The aftermath of the Salvajina dam and lake and the experience gained in the march of 1986 were key elements for developing a strong mobilization against the new project. The environmental impact studies carried out in 1997, added to the noncompliance by the companies of the 1986 agreements, played in favor of the local communities managing to stop the diversion of the river. This tension between the *Consejo Comunitario* from La Toma and the multinational corporation left in return also the first direct life threats by paramilitaries to local leaders.

The second trigger for the community organizing around Law 70 (1993) came with the threats of forced displacement by local and foreign mining interest. In what has been held up as exemplary case, members of the community council of La Toma went all the way to the *Corte Constitucional* denouncing two extraneous mining concessions granted by the *Ministerio de minas y energía* (BFC-021, 99 hectares and EKE-151, 314 hectares). According to the residents of La Toma, these concessions were given to particular citizens that didn't belong to the community and that intended to conduct business with the international mining company Anglo Gold Ashanti. According to the current Colombian legislation, besides the environmental permits, one of the requirements for obtaining this kind of exploration and extraction licenses is the verification of the existence, or not, of "ethnic communities" in the areas of influence of the projects. But given the essentialist conception of "black communities," constrained by the Law 70 to "barren lands in rural areas along the rivers of the Pacific Basin in accordance with their

traditional production practices, [and] to their collective property,” this recognition was denied for *La Toma*.

First, a report issued by *Ingeominas* in 2004 and later confirmed by *Ministerio del Interior y Justicia* in 2009, stated that no inquiries were made because no overlap was reported in the national databases between the mining concessions and any black communities (INGEOMINAS 2004, CRC 2010). According to these reports and other sentences the closest “ethnic populations,” as defined by the law, were nineteen kilometers away from the area petitioned. Based on these documents the “new” owners requested in 2009 the immediate suspension of mining activities held by members of the community council of *La Toma* that were “disturbing the area of exploitation” (Tribunal Contencioso Administrativo Del Cauca 2010). Requiring compliance with the resolutions and the Mining Code (art. 309) *Ingeominas* and the Regional Court in Popayán demanded eviction to the “disturbers” declaring them “illegal miners” and ordered the local authorities to meet the “new” owners’ request for protection and making the respective relocation. In August 2009 the first local mines were closed at dawn when residents were sleeping snatching from more than four hundred families the possibility of earning a living (El País, August 7, 2009). *Ingeominas* stated: “the mines were neither technically well operated nor secure for the miners, therefore ordered its evacuation as soon as possible” (El País, April 9, 2010).

Things got worse for community members, when between August and December 2009 leaders reported to the *Defensoría del Pueblo* that unknown armed forces were patrolling the rivers and that paramilitary groups known as “Black Eagles” were threatening people with pamphlets and text messages for their supposed links with

guerrilla groups and for opposing to what they called “economic progress.” As if that were not enough, on April 7, 2010, eight miners were killed in a gold mine on the banks of the *Ovejas* River (El País 2010, May 22). Later that same year a social leader was killed in Santander de Quilichao and other five people were assassinated in Suárez and Buenos Aires, presumably by paramilitary forces (PCN 2010).

Against these intimidations and the imminent eviction, activist and community leaders pushed different strategies. First, around five hundred miners blocked the Pan-American Highway demanding a meeting with pertinent authorities to fight back the eviction. At the same time using the legitimacy of the council, community leaders submitted to the *Sala Penal del Tribunal Superior de Popayán* [regional court] an *acción de tutela*, established by the constitution of 1991 as an expedite procedure for demanding protection of fundamental civil rights. In the document they claimed violation to the rights “to a dignified life, prior consultation, work, due process and autonomy and cultural integrity” (Sentencia T-1045A/10).

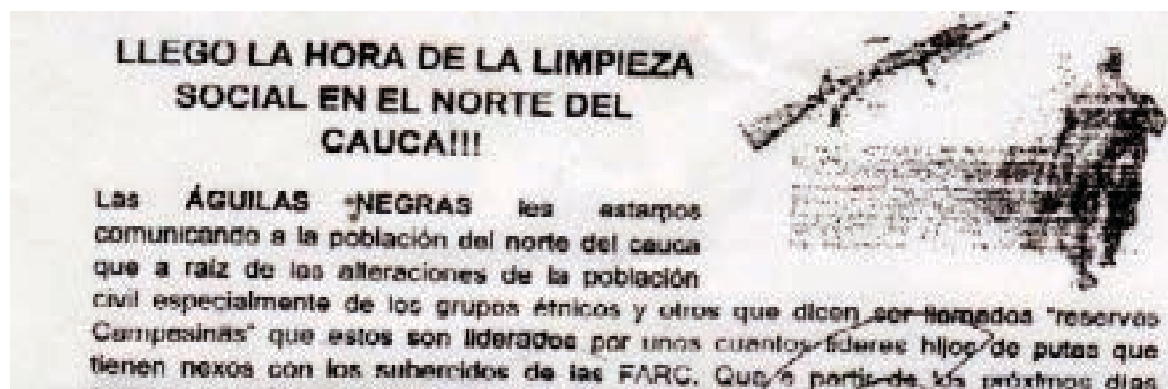


Figure 34. Since 2006 paramilitary group known as “Black Eagles” distributed pamphlets like the one above, threatening “ethnic communities” and peasants for their supposed links with the guerrilla group FARC and for opposing to what they called “economic progress.”

This tool, incorporated in the constitution since 1991, is not only the means by which people can defend themselves against the constant violations of human rights by public authorities or persons who hold positions of power, but also manifests itself as a tool for civil society to reclaim from the state what are considered “fundamental” social rights. Despite these efforts, the court did not change its position arguing that the report was correct. In subsequent days after the community leaders challenged the verdict, the Supreme Court ratified the eviction.

Concerned about this situation, community leaders complying with the mining code, submitted a request to legalize their mining operations that they have been practicing in the area. With this procedure they managed to delay their forced displacement while the application for legalization filed. Besides using their own contacts with national networks of Afrocolombian organizations like *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN) and the National Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES), residents of La Toma managed to press the constitutional court in Bogotá demanding protection under the *Auto* [writ] 005 of 2009. This writ, or court order, resulted from the pressure of black organizations in the country that insisted on the need to design differential aid programs for Afro-Colombian internal displaced people (Cárdenas 2012). Specifically the writ 005 protected groups that have been victims of three main causes:

- (i) a structural exclusion of Afro-Colombians that puts them at greater marginalization and vulnerability, (ii) the existence of mining and agricultural processes in certain regions that impose severe strains on their ancestral territories and has favored their dispossession, and (iii) weak legal and institutional protection of collective territories of Afro Colombians, which has encouraged the presence of armed groups that threaten the black population to leave their territories (Auto 005 quoted in Benitez Gomez 2012:29).

Alongside international connections were made with human rights organizations like Global Rights and well-known U.S. human rights advocates like Angela Davis. Together, in September 2010, these efforts managed to encourage the U.S. State Department, to include in its human rights report to Congress, the situation of La Toma's land dispute. Since Colombia was obliged to meet certain requirements in order to continue receiving U.S. aid, this move was intended to put some real pressure on the Colombian government, that at that time was also negotiating a free trade agreement with the United States of America. The Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) even sent an open letter to President Barack Obama regarding Colombia-US Free Trade Agreement:

this [is] an opportune moment for us to share with you our reaction and concerns regarding the Labor Action Plan Accord between the US and Colombia that was released on April 11, 2011 and includes strict protection measures for trade unionists and labor rights. (...) In a country where forming part of trade union amounts to a death sentence, this Plan is an important step forward in initiating long term work that seeks to guarantee effective protection for the human rights and labor rights of unionized workers. For AFRODES this plan has a great impact from the commercial and political viewpoint because we are profoundly worried that it does not include conditions that protect the human rights, territory, culture and autonomy of afrocolombian and indigenous peoples. (...) For AFRODES USA and Colombia, the approval and implementation of the Free Trade Agreement will have a negative impact on the lives of Afro-Colombian grassroots communities. As such, we are opposed to it unless the United States and Colombia adopt special measures to reinstate and protect the fundamental rights of our communities (AFRODES 2011).

As part of this strategy, Francia Márquez Mina who served as Vice-President of *La Toma's* community council at that time, and who worked in the mines part-time to support her two sons and put herself through Law school, was invited to New York where

she gave talks at CUNY and attended interviews with local reporters. The whole situation reached the media in 2011 in a special series on PBS called “Women, War and Peace.”²³

Finally, claiming that their mining practices were ancestral and more “environmentally-friendly” and arguing that the required process of free and informed consent never took place, La Toma residents managed to obtain from Colombian’s constitutional court a revision of the Supreme Court’s ruling. In December 2010, the constitutional court revoked previous decisions granting the *acción de tutela* to La Toma community council leaders. The court also overturned the resolution of eviction, ordering the suspension of the extraction and environmental concessions granted by the *Ministerio de minas y energía*. “If it were not for the international attention we have received, they would have killed everyone”, said an experienced black miner and leader, after the victorious news came out.

It is important to note that the ‘ethnic’ dimensions of some of these claims are still for some members a legal and academic construction that is both artificial and confusing. Even though, this particular case has allowed La Toma residents to interpret their social drama as a confirmatory act that reaffirms shared values and renews pre-existing bonds of trust. It is a recurring fact that people make frequent references to these struggles as new foundational stories that give them cohesion and meaning.

While conducting fieldwork, I was tempted to work exclusively on this case to study precisely what made the exceptional strength and determination of *La Toma* possible, including how its leaders managed to refocus their own rights defense work from the multicultural framework and the national scale, to broader arguments around the armed conflict, human rights and international conventions. Especially, I was intrigued

by how in the case of multinational investments and “development” plans, the community’s appeal to the particular conjuncture of the armed conflict (Auto 005) and legally binding international instruments like the International Labor Organization Convention No.169 (ILO 1989), ratified by the Colombian State, worked better than the active recognition of ethnic difference as stated in Law 70 to prevent dispossession from their lands.²⁴ But perhaps precisely due to all this activism, *La Toma* attracted so much media attention and social research since the 2010s, that working on their claims and area meant not only being part of a sort of celebratory reanalysis, but also fostered the hope that their situation could be extended to all northern Cauca region.²⁵ As I will argue next, instead of focusing exclusively on this case, I ended up being more intrigued by Faviola’s way of looking at their achievements and investigating the ways in which other groups in northern Cauca were not that successful.

Interethnic conflict, or divide and rule tactics?

Whereas La Toma’s experience proved to be exemplary, the types of struggles and forms of political organizing propelled by rights discourses reinforced, in other areas, racial and ethnic hierarchies. In the afternoon of Sunday May 22, 2011, an indigenous group from the *Nasa* community found cattle owned by black peasants feeding from their crops in the *finca* San Rafael, a plot of 517 hectares around the mountaintop of *Cerro Teta* in the southern part of the municipality of Buenos Aires, northern Cauca. The incident resulted in the death of one animal and the persecution of other cows that ended up injured. When the black peasants realized the issue, a violent confrontation broke out ending with the

death of an indigenous member of the Cabildo of Toribío; apparently due to a stray bullet.

Specifically, the indigenous Cabildo had been working those lands on an occasional basis since the government gave them the *finca* San Rafael to expand and consolidate their *resguardo* [indigenous collective territory] in 2008. For their part, black peasants from the *vereda* Mazamorrero contiguous to the *finca*, also sporadically used the land for grazing animals and for the exploitation of forests for timber. Through the different owners, which the farm passed along the years, black peasants managed to access these resources negotiating here and there permits of circulation and extraction in return for work on the farm. On that Sunday afternoon the cattle, used to free mobility along the meadows, activated a conflict that uncovered the unhappy effects of shifting the dialogue from claims of social equality to claims of ethnic and cultural difference.

In 2008, as a form of compensation, the Ministry of Interior gave the terrain in question to the indigenous families survivors of the *Nilo* massacre (1991), in which more than 20 people were assassinated for occupying the lands of the *Hacienda* of the same name in the foothills around Caloto. According to governmental authorities paramilitary groups undertook this massacre, but according to the testimonies of indigenous people the perpetrators were wearing police uniforms. Following the massacre and in response to indigenous and rights activist demands, on October 26, 1997, the *Inter-American Commission of Human Rights* took the case and conducted an investigation where the Colombian state was found responsible for not doing enough to prevent the killings despite the numerous complaints of the *Nasa* and other communities denouncing the presence of paramilitary groups in the region.²⁶ As reparation the state was ask to deliver 15,663 hectares to the affected communities.

The Commission's recommendation, known as the 'Nilo Agreement,' was adopted on July 28, 1998 by the government of Colombian President Ernesto Samper. After three years of non-compliance with the agreements, with the support of the CRIC (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca) several indigenous communities took the Pan-American Highway under the slogan "*Minga por la vida*" managing to achieve a Decree (982 of 1999), which finally give way to correct the unfulfilled territorial claims (Cajas Sarria 2011). It would take the government then years more to fulfill the agreement, not without generating, as we have seen, new frictions with black peasants clamming land in the same region (López 2016).

The problem is that, as with the Nilo *hacienda* near Caloto, these lands of Cerro Teta in the upper Cauca River had been at the center of long-standing disputes. As Bettina Ng'weno (2007) discovered in her ethnography about the political technologies producing territory and racialized citizen rights in Colombia, there were since the mid 1990s at least four competing claims to Cerro Teta. One from a miners' cooperative organized mainly by black people, another claim from an absentee landlord, and more recent disputes involved foreign investments, banks, and finally the Nasa people and the Nilo victims too (Ng'weno 2007:50). On top of that, as it was common all along the northern Cauca, there was an even longer history of conflicts over the land and mineral resources of the hill and its surroundings:

The gold miners of the area have had to struggle against large landowners, private mining companies, the immigration of mining labor, rich mining entrepreneurs and serf-like relations with mill owners who grind the ore to extract gold, for at least the last seventy years, in order to remain where they currently live and to retain their mines on Cerro Teta. Farmers have also been affected by and participated in these struggles but with relatively less intensity and urgency (Ng'weno 2002:67-68).

Thus, the fight for the “hill of gold,” as Cerro Teta is also known, was not supported by a unifying cause, as what happened in La Toma. Neither were they able to capitalize from the experience of being part of the protest organized by the Association of People Affected by the Salvajina Dam, which found support in the indigenous regional council CRIC and the *Red de Organizaciones de base*.

Since 1987, some ninety inhabitants of Munchique and Chambimbe, that were organized under a miners’ cooperative, managed to fight off the monopoly of mill owners that threatened people, and defy outsiders’ pretensions over mineral exploitation of Cerro Teta. Nonetheless, a broader social organization that could include other *veredas* to the southeast, as Santa Catalina and Mazomorrero, only gain traction when Nasa Indigenous groups made claims to the whole area in the early 1990s.

“Cerro Teta is also known as Cerro Catalina. People tell the story of the name in different ways,” said Cornelio a farmer and social leader from the nearby town of La Balsa in the riverbanks of the Cauca River. “But what I know, is that the name comes from *una india negra* [black indian woman] who had very large breasts. They were so large that *se los guaraquiaba aquí al hombro* [she had to put them back in her shoulders]. She was persecuted and somehow managed to reach the top of the hill, where there is big rock that only God knows how it ended up there, and she jumped from there,” said the man.

As the story of the name suggested, coexistence of indigenous groups and enslaved Africans dated back to colonial times. So as Gelima, to the north, the gravels of the Mazomorrero River and the Teta River, as well as its hills, were major placers and mining camps under the Caloto jurisdiction since the late sixteenth century. Here both

encomienda Indian labor and enslaved Africans were used by encomenderos such as Cristóbal de Mosquera and Captain Juan de Mera, who had in first quarter of the seventeenth century mining operations with waterworks and canals in the area (see chapter 1).

While the *Nasa* people used their position as native inhabitants appealing with attorneys to Law 89 of 1890, which guaranteed indigenous people rights to *resguardos*, black peasants and miners around Cerro Teta did not have in their repertoire anything more than the miners' cooperative and the experience of tenants and squatters that, back in the 1970s, used legal and violent confrontations to prevent the expulsion from their possessions. Ironically, as I have shown in previous sections of this chapter, despite the present rivalry, both populations had previously worked together to claim lands and rights. The uneven distribution of resources in the region united them in many occasions through class actions that helped them to defeat landlord and foreign interests on the region.

After attempting to solve the land problem appealing to previous pacts and through the form of demonstrations in the municipal capital, the indigenous claim put to the test a brand new language for the black peasants and miners. Helped by representatives of black communities from the Pacific coast and by local organizations, such as Sinecio Mina —which was in charge in Norte del Cauca of coordinating the efforts promoted nationally by the recently created PCN (Hurtado 2000: 48-49)—, eleven *veredas* organized into a council for black communities [The Black Community Council of *Cerro Teta*]. All these processes and pressure exerted over the central government granted the

veredas a few years before the state reconsidered once again the titling of the *finca* to the Cabildo in 2008.

In this manner, not without hesitations, leaders around Cerro Teta changed the struggle from mining licenses and land titles to broader claims around the idea of territory of black communities. The technology behind this move from land to territory, involved ethno-historic, demographic, and cartographic knowledges provided by a series of interventions and projects directed by NGOs and academic institutions. For instance, a human rights project developed by the Universidad del Valle and funded by the European Union was instrumental in setting up the community council of Cerro Teta back in 1995 (Ng'weno 2007:66). Despite the risks of being perhaps another tool for establishing governance, claiming territory, as council for black communities “was the best way to confront the indigenous claim in almost equal terms,” argued Don Laurentino a leader from Santa Catalina.

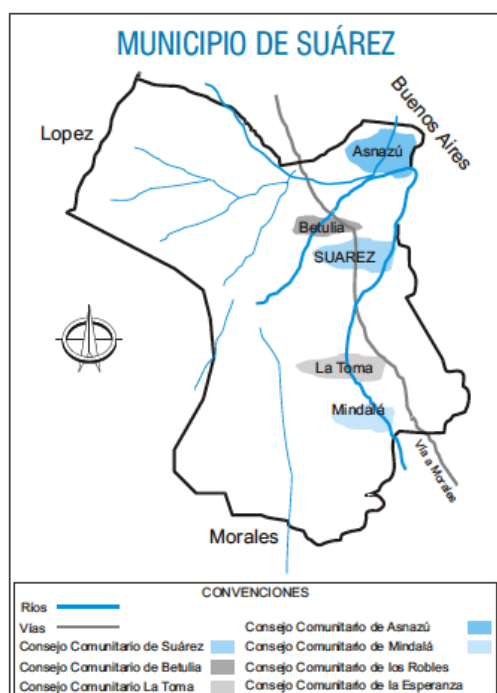
“The idea,” as Don Laurentino remembered, “was to push the margins of Law 70 into territories outside the Pacific coast.” Overall, this was a great challenge for the organization and demonstrated their capacities to subvert hegemonic meanings. In areas of high economic priority as the Cauca Valley the applicability Law 70 seemed impossible, but that didn't stop leaders and members to adapt the Law as means to advance their political project: “We might never receive recognition from the Ministry of Interior, and perhaps the whole idea of a collective territory will not work here, due to the existence of individual holders, but what we have achieved is a political status strengthen by a cultural dimension that previous organizations (e.g. *Juntas de Acción*) did not consider,” said Don Laurentino. Thus, despite of being part of a project “legibility and

simplification” that rendered space, and populations thin, measurable, and managerial, as James Scott (1998) would argue, these technologies also became political and symbolic opportunities for those defined under these categories.²⁷

Yet, the experience of promoting and negotiating these new meanings and its material possibilities has not been exempt of obstacles. Notwithstanding the organizational learning process, the new language and its bureaucratic and legal system, revealed soon some of its internal contradictions: “What happened is that the council was not been well defined, and it had many internal divisions,” said Cornelio referring to the declining of Cerro Teta’s council at the end of the 1990s. Preoccupations were related to whose interests were being prioritized (e.g. farmers’ or miners’), and under what conditions could the council make decisions on land ownership rights. These discussions were particularly salient with regard to newcomers: “For instance, in the place we call Chambimbe, people from Bogotá came in 1930s and set up a mill to grind ore, from that time on *paisa* families have arrived to the area and today we are talking about some 400 people that are invading,” added Cornelio. This social situation became a problem when thinking about the collectivization of landholding.

In the area of Mazamorrero, on the other hand, farmers and miners were tempted in the early 2000s to become part of a new council [Rio Cauca] that was being form with the assistance of a project lead by the *Unidad de Organizaciones Afrocaucas* [UOAFROC] (see Map 15). With the funding of USAID, this nongovernmental organization that appeared in 2003, developed maps and workshops with more than 150 leaders around the department. In the northern Cauca they assisted in 2004 with the

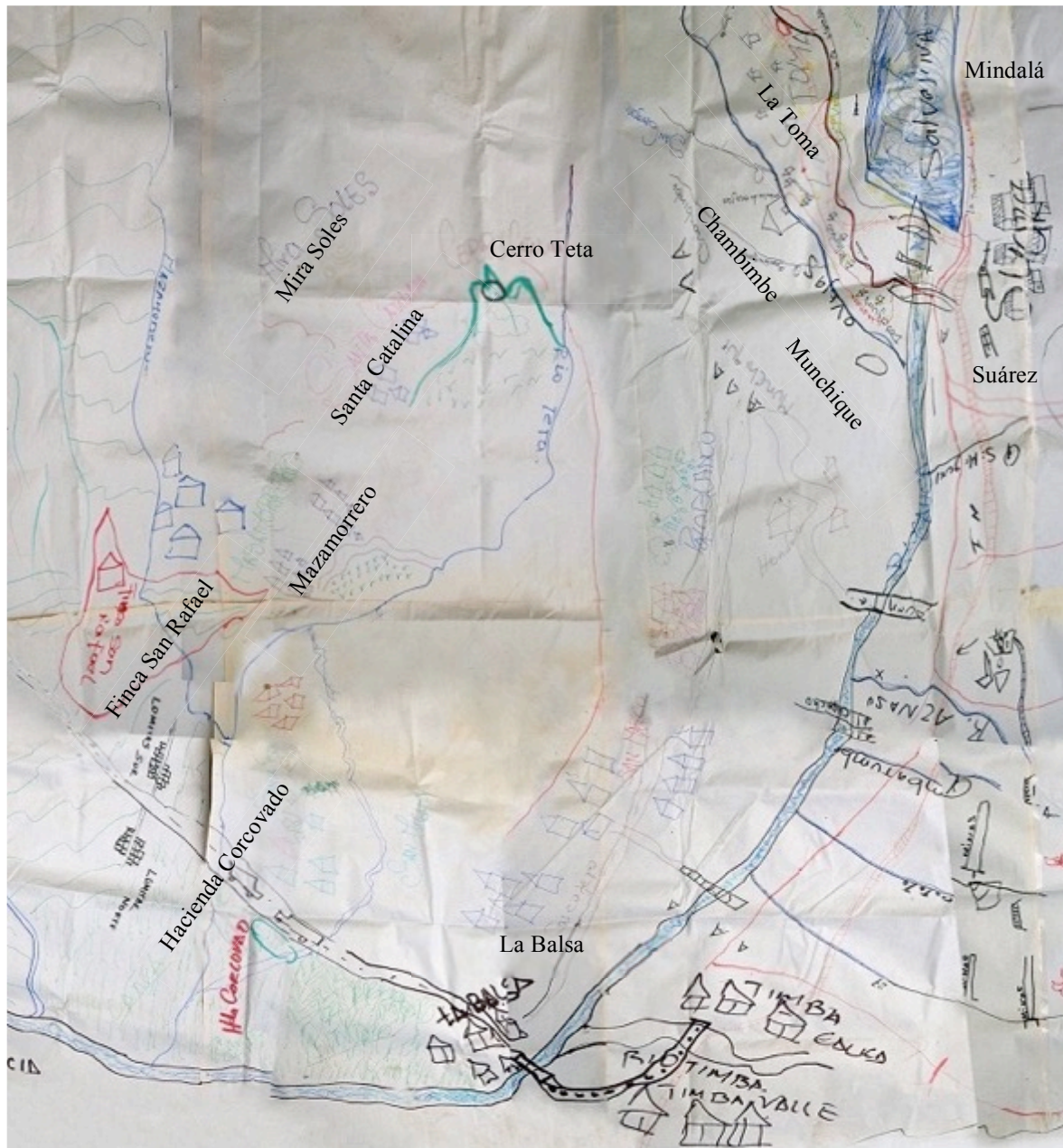
constitution of 8 new community councils and the strengthening of the work of other 10 (UOAFROC 2005).



Maps 15. Produced by UOAFROC to locate the community councils of Suárez and Buenos Aires. Two years later other *Conejos* (Zanjon de Garrapatero and Brisas) would demand a redefinition of jurisdictions and a discussion about limits and competences. Source UOAFROC 2005.

Years before, Mazamorrero had requested to the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER), the title of the *finca* in dispute (San Rafael) to be granted to the families of the *vereda*. At that time the collective territorial claims were not contemplated, but with other *veredas* they were organized in a zonal committee uniting *Juntas de Acción Comunal*. “We did not know anything about the Law for black communities at that time, however we began to hear about what other communities were being able to achieve organizing as *concejos comunitarios*,” said Julio, a young and moderately well-off leader from Mazamorrero, while drawing a participatory map in

2011 (see Map 16). La Toma's case, and the Community council de la Cuenca del Rio Quinamayo in Dominguillo —two of the councils, along with Cerro Teta, with more history in the area—, became according to him, great examples to emulate.



Map 16. Participatory map developed by members of the community councils of Suárez and Buenos Aires. Places named in text can be identified here. The workshop took place during the “action-research” program named *Herramientas par a la Autonomía Territorial* [Tools for Territorial Autonomy], see note 2 in Introduction.

These milestones and referents served them as a precedent to conform their own black community council in 2008. The name given to this new council was Zanjón de Garrapatero. First, with support from an educational institution from Santander de Quilichao [El Palmar], some leaders sent letters to the presidents of *Juntas de Acción Comunal* asking them to meet and discuss the benefits of a new organization. Then, in groups teachers and leaders started visiting *veredas* and informing people of the possibilities of the Law. A few years later, an observatory from a University in the capital city of Bogotá, whose mission was to support territorial claims for rural and ethnic communities in the country, contributed to reinforce the organization and negotiate its limits with other councils. “It was a process of research of our past and study of the law and mechanism,” remembered a woman involved in the workshops and meetings.

In this process, that I was able to accompany due to my affiliation with the *Centro de Investigación en Estudios Sociales* (CIES) at Icesi University in Cali, I found out that people did not always welcome the creation of these new forms of organization. Sometimes, when residents were informed about the process, they rapidly related the councils to previous *Juntas de Acción Comunal*, and therefore discarded them as another form of clientelism or *politiquería*. In other occasions, people saw the councils as part of the problem: “This whole conflict was instigated by governmental decisions, they invented the idea of *resguardos*, and now want us to fight the people that had been our neighbors. Sometimes I think that they want us to kill each other, so that the *ingenios* [industrial sugarcane mills] and the multinationals can take the land,” argued Julio.

Julio was referring to the unfortunately incident of the assassination of the indigenous member and the slaughter of the cow in the *finca* San Rafael, but he also had

in mind a previous event with another property in dispute. Answering to a video interview conducted by the team of the Observatory, Julio explained that their community council had been one of the organizations in the region that had struggled the most in terms of mobilizations and sociocultural conflicts:

(...) There are two places of interethnic conflict; one was with the *finca* Jague that lies between San Antonio and El Palmar. This is an estate of more than 400 hectares that was promised to the victims of the landslide of the Paéz River in the central mountain range. These were *mestizos* and indigenous people. But that was untenable for the community, because it was people from another region that came with another culture, and other needs that we were not able to sustain and maintain. They did not know that here we had an organized council. We did not have the recognition of the ministry, but we managed to stop the *chivas* that were already on the way. We gathered with other *concejos* from the area and manifesting together we insisted that this was not an indigenous territory, this were black ancestral lands (...)

Julio used here an elaborated discourse, introducing categories of analysis akin to social sciences knowledge. As María Jimena López (2016) has argued, in her narrative analysis of the case, members of Zanjón de Garrapatero council were able to position their situation defining it as an “interethnic conflict:” this category and strategy served to “represent their situation as one of inequality and competition, in which the State had involved the two communities” (López 2016:129).

In fact, for some social rights activist that I encountered in the process, the state and the national economic elites seem to have strong stakes in the proliferation of these kinds of geopolitical ambiguities. For them this conflict around *Cerro Teta* was the result of the classic “divided and rule tactics,” so familiar to Marxist approaches.

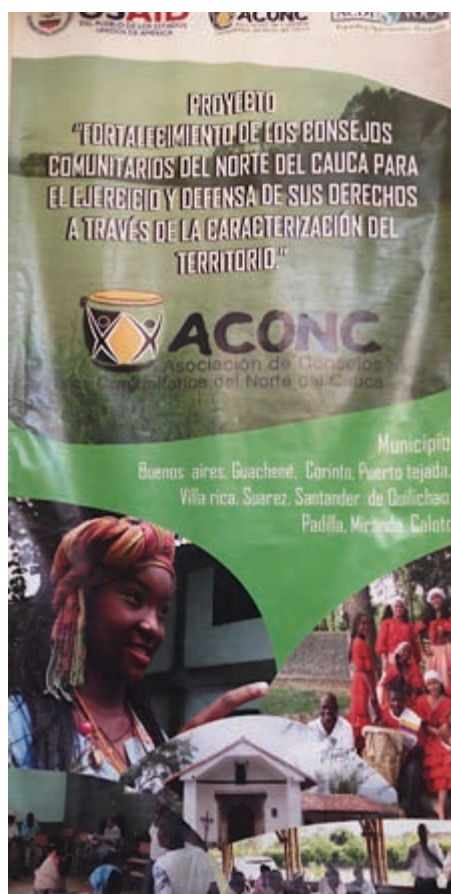
In short, the new constitution, and its related international instruments, brought not only opportunities, but also constrains in terms of social mobilization. Nonetheless, “state effects” were not the product of a singular intention or will.²⁸ This was evident in 2013

when the Colombian Institute of Rural Development (INCODER) launched its Acquisition and Endowment Program of lands to indigenous, black, and peasant communities of Cauca. This program was pushed forward by an alliance between academic institutions, social movements and state agencies in an attempt to solve territorial disputes. Anthropologist, political scientists, and lawyers were, as usual, involved in the process. The methodology was described as an inter-ethnic and intercultural conflict resolution strategy:

In the first place, [it involved] the construction of a balance both of the antecedents of inter-ethnic and intercultural negotiation in Cauca related to territorial claims, and of the agreements established between the national Government and the rural organizational processes of the department. Once the trust between the actors of the social processes and the national Government was reestablished through the creation of an *Afrocaucano* committee and a CRIC committee with the Incoder, the local negotiation processes between the *resguardo* of Toribío and the community councils were resumed. In a third moment, cartographic inputs were used and methodologies of interethnic and intercultural dialogue were implemented to arrive at points of agreement with respect to territorial claims of the indigenous *resguardo* and of Afro-descendant communities (Duarte 2015:108).

Finally, with this intermediation the community councils kept part of the San Rafael farm, while INCODER in compensation gave to the Toribío indigenous Cabildo additional budget to acquire other estates. On the one hand, one of the interesting things for this analysis is that here, the “state” was enacted in this situation within a heterogeneous assemblage of existing repertoires, practices, devices and types of authority. On the other hand, community councils, as well as indigenous *cabildos* and *resguardos* demonstrated to be political projects, not identity straightjackets. Usually, when conducting local census (as part of the requirements asked by the Law to register the organizations) and asking questions about how people self-identify, I was confronted

with situations where people said to belong to an indigenous group, but also manifested to belong to the black community council. In one occasion, in a *vereda* of Meseta above Mindalá, a woman insisted that she preferred to be part of black communities, instead of the indigenous *resguardos* because she felt more comfortable with the authority of the councils.



Figures 35 and 36. To the left a poster by ACONC [Association of Community Councils of Northern Cauca] promoting a project to strengthen the community councils of northern Cauca for the exercise and defense of their rights. USAID appeared again as funding the workshops. The absence of the word “black” in both posters was not only a short cut for what was already a long name [*consejos comunitarios de comunidades negras* as defined by the Law], but it was also an index of a particular appropriation of the Law. According to a young activist the decision of having different colors for each arm in the poster of the council (to the right) was intended to signal the idea that an “interethnic solution” was also possible

Ancestral territories

Attempting to bridge the gap between “governmental rationalities” and the study of “situated practices,” I remained attentive in my fieldwork to how local people experienced state officials on a day-to-day level. From inspection visits, to representations of the state in popular accounts, I observed how people navigated the complex bureaucracy: sometimes failing at the attempt to understand its practices, and other times learning to make the “state” work on their behalf.

I was in the flatlands around the Palo River following the historical links between mines and haciendas, when I received Faviola’s call from Mindalá: “State officials are being send from Bogotá. I think it would be a good idea if you and your colleagues, come back and accompany us in the meeting,” she said with her voice fading out due to a bad phone signal. “They are sending anthropologists to verify if there are black communities here, or not, so we need to show them that we also have our own experts!” she said ironically, but at the same time almost reminding me of our reciprocity agreement that allowed me to conduct research with the people of Mindala in the first place.

That same week, on October 2015, I received an email from the Colombian Anthropological and Historical Institute (ICANH) asking me about my dissertation research. According to their email, they had heard a conference I gave in an anthropological convention, and were interested in learning more about my work. They had been requested by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER) to develop an official concept on the situation of three “black communities” in the upper Cauca region and thought that my findings could be of use for that matter.

Since the “multicultural constitution” promulgated by National Constituent

Assembly of 1991, appealing to anthropological “expert knowledge” to substantiate “otherness” and rights has become recurrent for both local leaders and state institutions. Nevertheless, Faviola was not sure what exactly had triggered this inspection visit.

Mists were coming down the mountains of Suárez, when I saw her standing under a mango tree at the town entrance. We greeted each other with a warm hug. Before the meeting, I asked her for contextualization in order to be able to navigate and understand what was expected of the situation and of me. At first, she was not sure where all this attention came from. Lately, she had been busy negotiating an environmental management plan for the current operation and management of the Salvajina hydroelectric dam, but she wasn’t expecting anything that involved the Colombian Anthropological and Historical Institute. “We have signed and sent so many forms in the last years, that I don’t remember exactly which one activated this process,” she assured me nervously before entering the meeting.

After the round of presentations and salutes, the two anthropologist acting as state officials began inquiring people about what were their livelihoods. Sitting in a circle of plastic white chairs, the representatives of three community councils of the area, including Faviola, began answering cautiously: “Well, in this *veredas* we have coffee, and subsistence crops,” said Faviola.

“Do you have fruit trees, or other crops?” asked one of the ICANH’s anthropologists, a young woman that had recently finished her undergraduate studies in Bogotá.

“Fruit trees? Yes, we have some, and there is also cattle, in a very low scale,” Faviola hesitated for a minute and then continued, “and, it is no secret, but here people

grow coca too,” she said. It was evident Faviola was trying to calculate the reaction of the other participants before speaking about what the state deemed as illegal crops.

“And what about mining? Do you practice any kind of mining here?” asked again the young anthropologist.

“Ancestral mining,” answered quickly Artemo, a miner and member of the community council of Mindalá in the hill country of Suárez.

“And what about the environmental management plan that is being discussed with the EPSA, are you part of this?” asked the young anthropologist.

While this conversation was unfolding, John a leader from La Toma entered the room: “Good morning, I only came to say hi,” said the man apologizing for interrupting. He took his motorcycle helmet out, and sat near Faviola asking her quietly to brief him on what was being discussed. Although, La Toma was not among the community councils summoned to the meeting by the ICANH, his position, as legal representative of the Association of Community Councils of the municipality of Suárez, granted John the right to invite himself to the reunion. Faviola waited for Artemo to finish his account of mining practices and asked for a timeout to allow John to present himself.

“Well, first of all, I want to thank God for the opportunity to be here with you all,” said John standing up, and using his large thorax as a sound box. “Beforehand I apologize for arriving late, but the important thing is that we are here to contribute to the development of today’s agenda. I was just talking to Faviola, asking her what the scope and purpose of the meeting was because it seems to me that we have jumped right into some details of our livelihoods and the environmental management plan, but we are not yet sure what those details have to do with the objective of this meeting?” said John

politely, looking exclusively at the couple of ICANH's anthropologist. "I beg your pardon for what I am about to say, but why should we give you information about our communities, especially with an issue so delicate as territorial claims. We have done this many times before, people have come to ask us similar questions, and we have advanced in our history and our rights as black communities, so I think that we deserve to know if there is an agenda and what is the purpose of the meeting is, and from then on, how to move forward with the exercise," said John sitting back in his plastic chair.

"Yes, you are right," said the young anthropologist. "We have come because we have received a request about the ancestrality of the territories of three community councils of the municipality of Suárez. The request was made by the INCODER, because those three community councils have processed forms asking for protection of their territorial rights," she added while offering the participants to see the forms that she had. "So we have come then to meet with these three community councils," she said slowly, almost as measuring every word she was adding to hear speech. "So, we are here to gather information that allows us to elaborate an adequate concept about the ancestrality of your territories. Now we were just chatting a bit about the history of the Salvajina Dam and this whole process of the Environmental Management Plan, because we think it is important to highlight how the community councils have participated in such negotiations. Our idea was to be able to come and pick up those local histories," said the young woman.

John nodded with his head, but insisted on asking for more clarification: "Exactly what is it that the ICANH do? Let me try to put it better, and you let me know if it is necessary to specify more, or not," he said standing up once again. "On the part of the

community councils, there has been a very strong process not only here in Suárez, but in general in the northern Cauca region, demanding from the State recognition under the 70 Law. So far, we have recognition of the community councils as associations, but our collective rights to land are still far from being accomplished. In other words, there is no recognition of our territories as black communities yet. Even the INCODER has stated in previous occasions that there are no black communities here. So, when you speak about an official concept on the “ancestral territory,” is this equivalent to the granting of collective titling, the question becomes: Is this procedure going in that direction, or not? And moreover, why only three councils, when we are about thirteen in the whole northern Cauca,” said John.

John’s questions were not misinformed. He knew very well what such an expert knowledge could allow them to achieve, but he felt that the questions that were being made could potentially harm other councils in the flatlands, where the long process of proletarianization and dispossession at the hands of agricultural development had overshadowed subsistence practices and emplacement experiences. If “ancestral territories” were defined by essentialist conceptions, their counterparts among the sugarcane in the valley had little possibilities to pull out such claims. At the end of John’s intervention, the ICANH’s anthropologist explained that they were not sure what the INCODER was going to do with their report, and that they were not sure why the other councils were not being taken into account. They assumed that this had to do with a sort of compartmentalization of the whole processes, and they were almost sure that there were other ICANH’s anthropologists in charge of other communities. The meeting ended with a collective statement and letter issued by the Association of Community Councils

of Northern Cauca (ACONC), asking the ICANH in Bogotá to clarify their procedure, and demanding from them instead a report that would include all the councils in the region, not just the three initially considered.

Later that day, discussing the event with other leaders, I learned that in early 2015 a group of state consultants had held workshops in the area, which were probably the source, or the beginning of the INCODER request to the ICANH. Faviola, for instance, remembered a form provided by the *Defensoría del Pueblo* [Ombudsman Office], where she claimed violation to their territorial rights by armed groups. She had even already received the resolution granting the *comunidad negra* of Mindala inscription in the National Victims Register (Registro Único de Víctimas –RUV). Particularly since the making of the internally displaced people (IDP) category in 1997, the dissemination of human rights and related legally binding international instruments, influenced in Colombia an institutional design and social policy, which sought to promote measures for protection of patrimonial assets and provision for restitution of properties to victims and *desplazados* [internally displaced people], whose rights had been violated by the armed conflict (Vera 2017).²⁹

Apart from the denunciations about paramilitary presence carrying selective killings in the area since the 2000s, in the form presented to the Ombudsman Office, the community council of Mindala argued that development projects such as the Salvajina Dam were also part of the conflict. In their eyes, Salvajina was an agent of dispossession that enabled the concentration of land through the expansion of landholdings in the Valley, and displaced many families to the most marginalized outskirts of urban centers in the region. Moreover, as part of a three-year campaign by the Colombian army to

corner and suppress guerrilla leaders, bombing raids and military operations in the Cauca department increased since 2008. “Around dawn on Friday [November 4, 2011], we woke up hearing a bombing raid, hours later came the news; special forces caught up and executed Cano, the leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It all happened here behind these mountains,” said Faviola recounting me the constant fear they experienced during those years. Cano, a former student of anthropology in Bogota, had become the FARC’s leader after the guerrilla army lost in combat four members of the ruling Secretariat since 2008.

Apparently, what seemed to Faviola an isolated act within her countless tasks, as representative of the community council, was, in the eyes of John, a thoughtful strategy. Despite the bureaucracy and the variety of state institutions addressing social and cultural rights, John was quite knowledgeable on acts, decrees, and jurisprudence regarding territorial claims. As he explained to me, since the Constitutional Court passed the *auto* 005 [writ or court order] in 2009, black organizations and social movements had been carrying out workshops in several black communities of the area, with the purpose of identifying territorial affectations related to the armed conflict.³⁰ Later, when the “Victims and Land Restitution Act,” entered in effect in 2011, acknowledging for first time the rights of victims of political violence, a door opened for establishing a collective demand for the restitution of rights and lands. As John expressed, it was a way to face the limited character of the Law 70 [constrain to the Pacific coastal region], and find the way to take advantage of the *enfoque diferencial* [differential approach] of the court order:

For Afro-Colombian peoples, displacement, confinement, and resistance generate the loss of control of their territory and the deterioration of living conditions and the enjoyment of their rights. For these Colombians, the territory has a very deep importance that goes beyond simply having a

What the leaders on that October morning inspection visit, did not anticipate was that the ICANH had acquired, since 2010, the responsibility by presidential decree to process territorial claims that involved an ethnological or archeological differential approach. What was a counterhegemonic strategy back in the old days of militant intellectuals, who supported the indigenous movement during the 1970s land recuperations, became after the multicultural constitution a “common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination” (Roseberry 1994:361). Yet, there was no doubt that these forms of power could also become political and symbolic opportunities for those defined under their gaze, as it finally happened in January 2016, when the Association of Community Councils of Northern Cauca (ACONC) managed to succeed with their objective of achieving a positive official statement on the “ancestral territory of black communities” for twelve community councils of northern Cauca, both in country hill and in the flatlands. Moreover, between 2012 and 2015 the INCODER established a technical and scientific cooperation agreement with the Institute of Intercultural Studies (IEI) at Javeriana University in Cali, which coupled with the ICANH’s concept on ‘ancestral territories,’ was meant to increase the response capacity of state institutions in contexts of multicultural territorial claims and intercultural conflicts (See Map17).³¹ Members of the community councils showed not only creative cultural responses to the enabling and constraining forces of the multicultural regime, regarding state representations and development discourses they also were able to show that the production of meaning was not always on the side of hegemony.

“Buen vivir”

We are at a workshop in Mindalá that is part of a larger process of prior consultation between the Energy Company of the Pacific (Empresa de Energía del Pacífico, SA, EPSA) that runs the Salvajina dam and six community councils in the municipality of Suárez (Aznazú, Aganche, Mindalá, Pureto, La Meseta and La Toma). The session is intended to facilitate the development of a community-based proposal that take into account the impacts of the constructions and operation of the dam and the measures to redress them by negotiating an environmental management plan (EMP).

Faviola convened the workshop. This time, however, she, as the other community councils in the municipality, is receiving technical and legal assistance from the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN). In each community council, the PCN has conformed teams that are conducting capacity-building and reflection-oriented workshops on ethnic rights, free-prior and informed consent (FPIC), and environmental plans. This latter concern is the expertise of the professional designated by the PCN to lead the workshop. Robust and barbed, Héctor holds a university degree in agronomy from the *Universidad del Valle* and will lead today’s workshop.

The workshop takes place in the local school in a small classroom at the end of the sports court. The outside walls had been stenciled with designs. Among them, one catches Héctor’s attention: “Have you noticed the stencil outside this classroom,” Héctor asks to start the conversation with more than 30 attendees ranging from ages of 16 to 80. “Who can tell me, who people are?” he insists (See Figure s37 and 38).

A young woman in her school uniform answers quick: “One is Mandela, the other

is Martin Luther King and the last one is Obama, I think so.” “That is right,” says Héctor slowly repeating the last names like giving time for the words to resonate in the room. “And who can tell me why are they painted here?” he asks again. The elder look at each other with surprise murmuring between laughs imperceptible phrases. The same girl takes the stand again: “They are part of our black history, they have taught us how to defend ourselves from the abuses.” “Excellent,” says Héctor with satisfaction, while the girl’s comrades boo and hiss her for her smart-aleck interventions. “That is exactly what we are going to do today, to defend our territories and our right to a *Buen Vivir* [collective well-being]. What is your last name?” Héctor asks the young lady.

“Lucumí,” says the girl.

“And do you know where [the name] comes from?” inquires Héctor.

“Yes, it comes from Africa,” she says.

As the young girl who learned in her classes about the influence of these great man for the history of black people, Héctor had also learned back in the 1970s, while attending to undergrad studies, to vindicate traces of Africanism and black history. He was sixteen, though, when he entered the *Universidad del Valle*. He felt out of step, too young. But, he said he began feeling more comfortable when he encountered emergent urban groups partly influenced by the U.S. black activism and the anti-apartheid movement.³² In his personal story the First Congress of “Black culture of the Americas,” celebrated in the city of Cali on August 1977, held a special place. Organized and sponsored by Colombian research Foundations and Latin American Cultural Associations, the congress gathered over two hundred scholars, artists, and literary figures mainly from the African diaspora.³³



Figure 37, 38 and 39. Above, Africolombian posters draw by kids in Santander and also N. Mandela, M. Luther King and Obama Mural in Mindala. Photograph by the author. Below, News paperclip about the First Black cultural congress in Cali (1977). Source: <http://docrep.library.vanderbilt.edu/mzo/correspondence/MZO.corr.ICongresoPamph.197705.pdf> accessed September 2017.

“Colombian history will be rewritten if the delegates at last week’s Black Cultural Congress in Cali have their way,” read a newspaper clipping from *The Chronicle*, Colombia’s English weekly newspaper reporting on the realization of the Congress (See Figure 39). And according to Héctor, they did rewrite history.

The motivation to plan the Conference was described in the promotional pamphlet as follows:

Never before has it been so necessary to join social and cultural forces to establish the identity of the Negro in the American hemisphere as it is today. This means vindicating those of African descent, whether pure or of mixed race, who either openly or covertly are victimized as a result of attitudes inherited from a slave regime. The moment has come to leave lamentations behind and strike out for genuine vindication. The negro, mulatto and negro-indian populations of the Americas claim their rightful place within the American cultural pattern and to do this it is essential to bring together ideas and theories about the origin; development and destiny of African cultures in the American hemisphere. The spirit of enquiry of the younger generations should be channeled towards investigation into the values contributed by peoples of African descent, to serve as a foundation for the spreading and stimulation of political economic, social and cultural vindication of the population of Negro origin in our continent.

From this Congress, Héctor remembered especially the intervention of the Afro-Colombian novelist, anthropologist, and physician Manuel Zapata Olivella, who not only organized the meeting, but also insisted on the importance of informing Colombians about their “African roots” and promote “Afro-Colombian culture.”

“It was the first time that I realized that capitalism did not exist without racism,” recalled Héctor when I interviewed him afterwards. “That was something that Malcolm X had said before,” he clarified. But, hearing Zapata Olivella pointing to the relation of the slave trade with capital accumulation was something that made him realize the connection with present inequalities and black’s exclusion in Colombia’s national discourse.³⁴

Bettina Ng’weno (2007) has maintained that in urban centers such as Villarica and

Puerto Tejada, in the lowlands of the valley, there has been more of identification with Africa than in rural areas of northern Cauca, such as Buenos Aires or Suárez. Whereas in the highlands of northern Cauca, rural communities making claims to land, despite their understandings of identity politics, were more careful not to distance themselves from the nation. Ng'weno argues that this association with a distant continent is related to the process of proletarianization and the loss of land at the hands of the expanding sugarcane plantations:

for people in this region who no longer occupy or own land and who participate in large-scale capitalist production, the stakes in identity are different. Africa allowed for cultural distinction, even pride, without having the distancing effect from the nation because it was not combined with rural land. Here, anti-discrimination based Black youth organizations were eager to see similarities in culture with Africa and to fight for national recognition as Blacks through cultural and historical ties to Africa, establishing a place for Black people in Colombia (Ng'weno 2007:132).

I found, however, the complete opposite in towns nearby industrial areas. But what happened when these claims and identifications with a distant continent were combined in overlapping ways with claims around rural land? Did this imply a “distancing effect” from the nation as Ng'weno suggested? Héctor rejected this thinking arguing that these identifications were meant to link and unite, rather than fragment or divide. After the workshop, he asked me for ride to Santander. Since I was heading to Cali I agreed confident that it would give us time to talk about these matters. Knowing Héctor's willingness to critique anthropologists who had problems with the idea of “traces of Africanism” in Colombia's black populations, I prepared my self mentally for this encounter.

We have left the town of Suárez, and were heading northeast following the course

of the Cauca River. I peered out Héctor's window overlooking the expansive river, whose waters have just been released by the hydroelectric turbines. It ran turbid between islands of sand and gravel.

"What do you think about the workshop?" he asked me with his hoarse voice.

"How did it go?"

"I think it went well," I answered prudently and remain silent for a moment engrossed in the road before me. Becoming aware of the opportunity, I break the white noise produced by the unpaved road: "To be honest, I am curious about the notion of *El Buen Vivir* [good living or well living] that you mentioned on repeated occasions," I said.

"That is simply the way we call the right to autonomous development," Héctor was quick to say.

"I have been hearing lately how Arturo Escobar is mobilizing in the academia the notion to construct what he calls a "political ecology of difference" (see Escobar 2010:100). How is he related to all this?" I asked Héctor.

"Well, you know he has collaborated with us since long time ago; he is not only a thinker, but also an activist. However, *El Buen Vivir* is something we came up with," Héctor said.

"You mean the PCN?" I asked.

"Yes, PCN and especially Libya Grueso," Héctor clarifies. "Have you read her?"³⁵

"But I thought *El Buen Vivir* had to do with the Andean philosophy of *Sumak Kawsay* [the Quechua word for *buen vivir*], as in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian new constitutions that use the notion as a paradigm of sustainable development," I argued.

“No, that is fairly recent, those constitutions are from around 2009 and we in PCN have been using the concept as early as the 1990s. But let’s say that we are all looking for something very similar,” Héctor said. “We have conversed with other movements and find inspiration in many other processes.”

“What do you mean by using the concept?” I asked again.

“I mean in the development of alternative productive projects, particularly in the South Pacific Rivers. In certain ways we were putting ideas to the test, we were looking to refine what we call our ‘ethno-territorial vocabulary,’ and to strengthen the organizational skills of the *concejos*. We even used it here in northern Cauca around 2000 when they were negotiating to recover the *hacienda* lands in Pilamo to obtain a collective title,” Héctor said.

“But the notion did not come alone, did it? I asked

“No, that is right. We also talked at least in the Pacific of a *region-territorio* [region-territory], something that here has been a little bit more difficult.”

“Why is it so?”

“Well, look around,” he said.

“How do you see then the possibility of claiming lands here as territory?” I inquired.

“What we have been doing here, or what the *concejos* are doing very well, is insisting on the idea of ‘ancestral lands;’ it is a way of expressing belonging and connection with those who came before,” he said.

Without mentioning it, Héctor was in many ways echoing a vision sometimes referred in Zapata Olivella’s texts as *muntú*. If indigenous groups had constructed their

own cosmovisions of territory and nature as “Mother Earth” —a totality where there is no division between humans and nature, a complementarity where the material and the spiritual world coexists promoting understanding and reciprocity across difference—, Afrocolombian movements found in African philosophies their own way to construct life-vision of development and community. According to Zapata Olivella,

Family as the sum of the deceased (the ancestors) and the living, united by the word to animals, tress, and minerals (earth, water, fire, and stars) (...) in an inseparable knot. It is the conception of humanity that the most exploited peoples in the world, the Africans give back to the European colonizers without bitterness or resentment. A vital philosophy of love, happiness, and peace among men and women and the world that nourishes them (Zapata Olivella in Walsh 2011:56).

Illustrative is the fact that in some *concejos comunitarios negros* in the Pacific coastal region, such perspectives informed community-based plans of autonomous development and environmental management. In fact, although since the mid-eighties the progressive Church formed peasant organizations around claims on land and agriculture (Villa 2001), “black history” and “culture” were also promoted by members of organizations such as Cimarrón (Wade 2010:125).³⁶ Since then, recurring to ideas of sacred or symbolic attachments to land, or finding roots in African philosophies as *muntú*, and ideas associated to *El buen vivir*, has been a powerful strategy to claim territory under the rubric of the 1990’s constitution.

Work on “blackness” in Colombian anthropology has revolved around concepts of “survivals” of Africanism adopted from Herskovits framework (Arboleda Llorente 1950; Friedemann 1984; Granda 1977; Price 1955), and notions of “cognitive orientation”, borrowed from the tradition of Mintz and Price (Arocha 1991; Arocha 1996; Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Mintz and Price 1976). These concerns with what Nina de Friedemann

and Jaime Arocha called traces or imprints of “Africanness” [*huellas de africanía*], helped to challenge prevalent visions of Colombian society as mainly influenced by European and indigenous heritage. However, since the late 1990s a growing body of scholarship has demonstrated the contingent and complex ways people perceive, perform, and talk about racial identifications. And how, in turn, these practices and claims must be seen not only against the particular power relations within which those attributions are made (Losonczy 1997; Restrepo 1997; Wade 1995), but also in the context of how racial formations travel and how are imagined and negotiated transnationally (Gilroy 1993; Yelvington 2003). For instance, the work of Peter Wade has insisted on the importance US black activism and the anti-apartheid movement for black cultural and political organizations in Colombia, as well as in the mass-mediated images of blackness associated with certain cultural expressions and patterns of consumption (Perry 2008; Sansone 2003; Wade 1999).

In a similar way, Catherine Walsh has insisted that these life-visions should not be understood as simply “ethnic” or “cultural.” She argues, following Noboa (2011), that these are “epistemic attitudes valuable for all of us struggling to think with and through other logics (...) that they can be thought as pedagogies that disrupt and invert the colonial matrices of power (Walsh 2011:58). Starting with the deconstructive practices propelled by social movements, coupled with the 1990s criticisms to development models, there has recently been a renovation of political strategies that try to imagine new practices and ‘spaces of representation’ articulating images of biodiversity, with the history of an inhabited space, that is imagined as a site of identity and resistance. In this respect, the longer-term political organization of black communities has allowed the

region to be rethought as a space, where not only do different discourses compete —some with greater power effects than others—, but also as a place that negotiates and contests alternate forms of production, while it simultaneously resists new forms of occupation.

Final remarks

In this chapter, I have argued that state endorsed multiculturalism, human rights, and other associated international instruments and discourses, have changed the political landscape under which long-marginalized peoples in northern Cauca traditionally framed their demands to the state, or their interactions with other local, regional, and international actors. In these demands, transnationally attuned constructions and historical meanings attributed to “blackness” and “ancestral live-visions” of development and autonomy have changed previous languages of class struggle and reified essentialist ideas of “territory.”

Additionally, prior understandings of political action have been transformed into legal claims for state recognition and desires for consultation and participation in specific development projects as a means to improving living conditions. But I have also, tried to show how in this context (as elsewhere) human rights, multiculturalism, and development are discourses that have different meanings and consequences in everyday life in local communities depending on how, and by whom they are implemented and mobilized.

On the one hand, when deployed by state institutions these discourses can operate as a doctrine that naturalizes relations of power by compelling marginalized people to identify with essentialist standards of culture and belonging (Povinelli 2002). In this corporate and managerial variation, rights can easily converge with regulatory and

normalizing powers in ways that often extend their own reach (Brown 1995:98). This is especially true when different groups (from state officials, to NGOs, intellectuals, and activist) engage actively in the production of competing notions of “culture” and “rights,” where material, experiential and political dimensions are not always easily integrated as a complete social process. In other words, all this implies certain practices and modes of subjectification that are transforming the very meaning of political action and the expectations and hopes for individuals and collectivities.

Seen from this perspective, it is difficult to deny that these legal claims also have powerful state-effects. Framing their claims under the categories of the multicultural state, or under the discourses of human rights, has co-opted more radical forms of demand; dividing politically subordinate groups, and impacting significantly their understanding of political action. This contradictory situation is not surprising. After all, as long as the debate and implementation of “culture” and “rights” is still premised “on a fixed and abstract” conception of both terms (Merry 2002:31), as long as its cultural and geographic “essentializations” remain presented as “uncontested and self-evident,” they would potentially work in the service of a politics of inclusion and exclusion that contradicts the flexible, contested, heterogeneous, and context-dependent character of such constructs.

On the other hand, these discourses and legal instruments are also appropriated, translated and contested in different ways on the ground. While it is true that multicultural and development regimes can be modes of naturalizing the status quo, some of the members of the community councils, as discussed above, have showed in their uses of the Law and rights, creative cultural responses to old conflicts of relations of

production and land tenure. To be sure, the emergence of groups of intellectuals and activist trained in the language of human rights that attend international conferences (and media spaces) in representation of these communities is changing the relations of power of previous struggles. For example, as I will show in the next chapter, the skills for conducting defense work and developing proposals seeking international cooperation, have granted Francia, Faviola and other women a promissory political space. Therefore, in the current context of transnational networks of activism these global rights discourse can be seen not only as buttressing the sovereignty and legitimacy of the nation-state, but also as having local contestations that serve the strategies of long marginalized groups.

Chapter 5. Underground politics

After my third research stint visiting towns in the mountains surrounding Suárez, photographs like the one below —taken over the Quinamayo River in the plain areas of Santander de Quilichao (see Figure 40)—, appeared in every local media, mayor national newspapers, and television network in Colombia. The growing succession of alarming newspaper headlines, and panoramic slides showing exposed red earth cuttings through green mountains, and craters filled with strong sulfuric acid and metal oxides, was too shattering to ignore. Approximately 13 kilometers of the river were affected with more than 35 mining pits with depths around 50 and 70 meters. I rapidly changed rapidly my plans and sooner than expected I started visiting the flatlands near Santander de Quilichao.

Following the road, drawing a sort of curvilinear trace, Quilichao is about 40 kilometers away from Suárez. It is said that the town was named after an indigenous phrase, which translates as “land of gold.” There are archival references of native populations located in *Quilichavo* (later Quilichao), whose occupants in 1569 were around 240 Guambiano indigenous according to the *visita* of Pedro de Hinojosa (Herrera 2009:181). In towns like this one, mine owners had “forced Indians to cultivate plots of maize; sweet manioc, or yucca; sweet potatoes or batatas; and plantains on slopes near the mining camps” (West 1952:104). Today, most descendants of these indigenous groups have been forcibly displaced towards the southeast retrenching in the upper parts of the mountainous territory of the central cordillera.

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Hasta el domingo hay inscripciones en el Sena para programas de formación presencial. Son 81.218 cupos en el país, de los cuales 5.384 corresponden a Buga, Palmira, Buenaventura, Cartago, Tulua y Cali. Son 322 programas, dijo la directora regional Esperanza Ramos. Inf: www.sena.edu.co

Sobrevuelo destapa las 'ruinas' por fiebre de oro

Al tiempo que la **FAC inutilizó retroexcavadoras** en minas de oro ilegales, cinco comunidades recorren el Cauca para frenar impacto de la minería.

Popayán. Estas máquinas y hombres que las operan tienen el efecto de un 'cáncer ambiental': carcomen y devasta todo cuanto encuentran a su paso. Bosque, ríos contaminados, fauna que desaparece y en riesgo el abastecimiento de agua para ciudades de dos departamentos son efectos en el norte del Cauca tras el oro en minas ilegales. También luto por homicidios y derrumbes. Un sobrevuelo en equi-

También es lucha afro
A finales de diciembre, 30 miembros de la comunidad afro, residentes en La Toma, jurisdicción del municipio de Suárez, exigieron a los mineros ilegales asentados en el río que retiraran las retroexcavadoras de manera inmediata, y al Gobierno Nacional que tomara las acciones pertinentes. Francia Márquez, vocera afro, tuvo que salir desplazada.

iniciaron una minga contra la minería ilegal asentada en el río Orejas. "El propósito es hacer tu control, decirles no a la multinacionales y a la minería ilegal en nuestros territorios, ya que nos está generando un grave impacto con la destrucción de nuestro ecosistema que hemos cuidado por siglos."

Daño ambiental y luto por derrumbes o las luchas por territorios, efectos de la ilegal explotación de oro.




Figures 40 . Above, a clip from the regional edition of a national Newspaper, El Tiempo. The headline reads: *Over flight uncovers the ruins left by the gold rush*. Source: El tiempo February 14, 2015. Below, aerial photograph of alluvial gold exploitations in an area close to the *vereda* San Antonio, in Santander de Quilichao, Northern Cauca. Source: Agencia EFE/Christian Escobar Mora 2015
<http://www.efeverde.com/noticias/corte-constitucional-colombia-impide-explotaciones-mineras/> accessed 14 Junio, 2016.

Santander de Quilichao is home to about 96,518 people, almost half of them living in the surrounding rural areas.¹ Alexander, a black commercial farmer from San Antonio, was one of them. He was fifty-one years old, and of thin and high build. Nevertheless, his broad shoulders and square-jaw, gave him a confidence strong enough to command an entire platoon. He wore drill trousers, well-polished brown leather shoes, and a black belt that keeps his white shirt in line. I met him in one of the many meetings convened by social organizations and communities impacted by the uncontrolled mining activities that the press was reporting. The following morning, we both got on one of the old jeeps that serve as local transportation and head to his *finca* [farm] on the riverbanks of the Quinamayo River. While riding the jeep, he recalled the context of the aerial photographs that called media attention nationwide: “I remember watching a gray military helicopter flying over our heads. However, instead of the usual door gunner,” he said, “long camera lenses were coming out of the aircraft.” Pointing to the river, reporters and cameramen were videotaping and photographing what they would later describe in the papers as “the most affected areas in the North of Cauca by illegal mining” (El Tiempo 2015).

The intention of this overflight, according to a General of the Air Forces in Cali, was to make public the ecological damage that illegal mining practices were causing, and the prosecution actions that were being taken against them (El País 2015). For the past three years, the Colombian Air Force had been carrying out similar flights in other areas of the country documenting devastated landscapes produced by mechanical and hydraulic excavating techniques.² Yet, none of these flights bothered to focus on the thousands of hectares of environmentally disastrous agro fuel plantations nearby, or in the shiny and

bigger mines operated by Canadian companies in the Andes, neither had they orders to register one of the largest open-pit coal mines in the world located north of the country. “Those are the beautiful mines, only photographed for advertising the mining industry,” commented Alexander. “I think the point of all this noise,” as he went on saying, “is to get us out of the business. They argue that it is because of the armed groups that are taking advantage of the situation, they even argue environmental risks too, and that might be truth, but the real matter is that all they want is a piece of the cake, as everyone else,” Alexander insisted.

Before planting mangoes and other fruits, that grow as golden as the ores that nourishes them, Alexander had been in the military, more specifically in the Air Force. Flying over Meta and Caquetá departments, one of the traditional strongholds of the FARC guerrillas in central and southern Colombia, he remembered once being ordered not to destroy cocaine laboratories marked in the rooftops with a big X. “I don’t see how this is different than that,” he said arriving to San Antonio. “First it was cocaine, now it is gold. And if you pay to the right people, nobody is going to bother you,” he sentenced.

The 2010 “coca survey,” carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), seemed to give him the reason.³ The report showed the lowest levels of coca leaf cultivation (62.000 hectares) since the Integrated System for Monitoring Illicit Crops (SIMCI) started in 2001. When the monitoring began coca leaf cultivation was estimated at about 145,000 ha. As coca production fell, the region’s long established informal mining sector began to grow rapidly. Mining gold was not as reliable as coca farming, but for those willing to change their hand, it promised much higher returns thanks to the rising of international gold prices. At the time, with security forces far more

concerned with eradicating coca than preventing “illegal mining,” it also promised less risk of police persecution: “while cocaine travels clandestine routes from supplier to consumer, illegal gold travels with legal documents via airfreight” (Bargent and Norby 2015).⁴

When people in the area talk about what had happened to the rivers and towns nearby, they often bring up the tragedy of the mine *Agua Limpia*, by the name of a small creek that flows into the Quinamayo River. There, in May 2014, a landslide left between twelve and forty miners buried alive—depending on who tells the story—. The incident became, for a couple of days, a story of national heartbreak. For many inhabitants the tragedy was *la gota que colmó el vaso* [the drop that overflows the glass], it was what triggered the explosion of media attention and what ended the patience of leaders and social movements.

The fact that the landslide had happened two days after a public hearing about the mining situation in Norte del Cauca was used to criticize the lack of attention and interest of national government in solving the issue. Organized in Santander de Quilichao by an alliance of indigenous associations and black community councils, the meeting demanded the presence of state officials (e.g. the Ministry of Energy and Mining) in order to stop what people understood not only as “the disastrous consequences of the extracting operations connected to armed groups and drug traffickers, but mainly of the government’s Mining Locomotive.”⁵ Concerns like the violation of the right of “prior consultation” in mining concessions, the lack of job opportunities, and the absence of guarantees and protections for inhabitants and movements opposing these operations were strongly argued by participants. “Sadly, if it were not for the tragedy they would not

have heard us,” lamented a social leader. “In addition, it was Labor Day, imagine the irony,” he concluded.

But the social landscape that I encountered in the mines was full of gray areas and was less coherent than public hearings or leaders usually portrayed it. As community councils began to oppose the entry of *retroescavadoras* [dredgers], many local people were actually benefiting from it performing small mining activities in the big *entables mineros* [mining camps], and taking advantage of trading opportunities generated all around the lucrative business of gold. According to people I talked to, some locals, who were obtaining exploration licenses, were also likely working as proxies for big mining companies and gold traders. Others, like Alexander, were just *prestando* [lending] their lands to what some described as a “community mining entrepreneurship.” This was the predicament of Alexander and others like him, who didn’t deny that they were using heavy machinery, but insisted that they were “not *trabajando con el conflicto* [working with the conflict],” as he referred to those involved with paramilitaries, criminal groups, or guerrillas. “You never know for sure whom you are involved with, but what you learn is never to ask.” By lending his land, an owner could receive between 15% and 18% of the profit of each *entable*, a rate that some people assured me, was not a good deal, “but at least was something.”

“The night of the disaster,” Alexander told me approaching the riverbank, “more than ten *retroescavadoras* [dredgers] fitted in that hole.” Now, there was no heavy machinery left, but newly constructed *entables* [mining camps], fresh holes, and hills of rocks indicated that the site was seeing new life under different techniques (see Figure 41).



Figures 41: *Cúbicos* in the Quinamayo River. The name is after the shape and type of the tunnels used, which go down in a vertical line extracting cubic meters of lodes and rocks near the riverbanks. In one of this *cúbicos* visited on May 2015, I found 9 people working inside the mine, which was being drained with *motores de achique* [pumps] because the river was increasing the water pressure on the tunnels. Below the mountain of rocks eight *barequeros* were allowed to search for ore particles after the *clasificadora* had remove the most valuable rocks and lodes that were later taken to the long rows of tumblers that crush minerals. Photographs courtesy of Laura Silva Chica.

When he was young, he recalls that his elders told him that exactly where the land collapsed, there used to be a small pond protected by a coral snake with very long curls. Others talked about the ghost of an Indian woman, and even an elusive goblin figure. In any case, it was said that supernatural creatures guarded the gold. As a child, when he went to chop sugarcane and gather bananas for feeding the horses, he would pass by, with fear of stepping where he should not. Any grass that brushed his bare legs made him jump up in fright.

“*Los mayores* [the elder],” he tells me, as we look at the more than 40 meters deep mine pit, “knew that this site contained lots of gold, but they did not exploit it like people do today. They would occasionally come here to *completar su remesa* [supplement their income], but they would not dig more than necessary to plant a cacao tree,” he said.

Walking under a sun that Alexander described as “a very hard moon,” we approached the mine hidden by trenches of stone and accumulated gravels. “That night what happened was that people began to find gold in big pieces. Neither the cracking soil, nor the noise of the earth shaking above them, managed to frighten the miners. The gold shone in the murky waters and dazzled all of them. When I helped people out, they had rocks in their boots and even in their bras. Some came from Cali, and others as far as Pasto, Caldas, or Buenaventura. I believe the deaths must have been more than what the press reported, because there were several motorcycles left by the pit that no one ever claimed,” he said.

On our way back to his house we encountered a woman walking with her *batea* [pan]. Instead of panning, she had been using the *batea* for washing clothes in the river.

Right before she could disappear in the bend of the road, Alexander called her out loudly: “Francisca wait,” shout Alexander. “Come here, there is someone I want you to meet,” he yelled.

“We are not just miners, we are *mineros ancestrales* [ancestral miners], and agro-miners if you like, write that down,” said the thin but strong women, right after Alexander told him that I was an anthropologist interested in knowing more about the history of the area and its populations. As I began to phrase my project trying to come up with a better self-introduction, Alexander interrupted me to explain her that I had been accompanying Afro-Colombian community councils in the area in the process of gathering oral histories to substantiate their rights struggle. As soon as Alexander said those words, the women changed her defensive stance and continued talking.

“Nowadays, one has to be very careful with how things are said,” she replied looking at Alexander in an apologetic way. “There has been a lot of misinformation; people that haven’t lived the consequences of all this go easily around saying that what we do is illegal mining,” she added, while we tried to keep her fast pace.

“Here,” Francisca continued, “we have had traditional mining, the one that is done with *bateas* as this one, and *almocafres*. We used the sands and riverbanks, but nothing else. It was not meant to make us rich, people didn’t come every day like they are doing now, it was something we did in the dry seasons, when rivers were quiet and the farms were not producing much. People gathered one or two grams of gold and saved them for especial occasions; for the holy days, to spent in the *fiestas* [celebrations] in Christmas,” Francisca said.

“What happened,” clarified Alexander, “is that with the new laws if we use technology, then we are no longer artisanal miners, and you have to decide whether to work *aluvión o filón* [alluvial or vein mining], but you cannot do both,” he said.

“Yes, you have to remain in one spot, you cannot just move around as we have always done looking for the best options, because if you do so you are now ‘illegal’. Say if it is not so, Alexander?” Francisca replied. “But, what is legal? Correct me if I am wrong, but as far as I know there has been people mining here since 1600s,” she argued confidently. Alexander and I listened sympathetically, nodding with our heads repeatedly. Francisca’s account denounced in her own way the same ‘geography of imagination’ enforced by aerial photographs. Just as early as nation-building projects equated labor unrest in the region with a “land populated by demons” (see Chapter 3), customary access was conveniently confused now with illegal activities and armed groups.

These were some of the images, and bits of conversations, I engaged in the neighboring areas of Santander de Quilichao in the first semester of 2015. In that tense moment, most miners were hesitant to discuss matters with outsiders. After all, the region played since the early 2011 to mid 2015s a particularly central role in the struggles surrounding mining politics in Colombia, to the point that it became the quintessential site of what state officials and mainstream media labeled as *minería ilegal*. Over and over again, *Norte del Cauca* made headlines in both local and national papers featuring discussions that connected mining activities with environmental pollution, corruption, or armed groups. On other occasions, ideas associated to the rights of *mineros ancestrales*

(ancestral miners) were invoked as a symbol of a neglected history, both in terms of belonging and in terms of their role in the production of the wealth of the region.

No doubt, as I showed in the first chapter, the gold bearing gravels and sands around the many tributaries of the Cauca River were determinant in these narratives and stands. But, what politics were enabled, reproduced, or foreclosed by these articulations of nature, history, and labor/rights? How could gold mining function as a site upon which debates around belonging and protection were contested, and as a means by which hierarchical and exclusionary forms of production were constituted? These are some of the questions I attempt to answer in this last chapter.

Before-and-after effect

Later that week, reading newspapers clips and viewing the above-mentioned aerial photographs with a group of miners from San Antonio, in the Quinamayo River, I tried to ask inhabitants what they thought about how things were being portrayed by the media. For some of them living near the *entables mineros* [mining camps], what was surprising is that the articles didn't mention much about people's daily struggles or desires to improve, much less about the grieving of those who lost friends and family in the falling down of the Agua Limpia mine.⁶

In fact, what caught most of the attention of air reconnaissance teams were mainly questions about environmental damage and water contamination. Since most parts of the city of Cali, in the center of the valley, got its drinkable water from the Cauca River, special attention was being given to the use of mercury, and other toxic compounds like cyanide used in the gold extraction process. Concerns were also raised about the blasting

away of riverbanks, and the disappearance of habitats for small reptiles, birds, and other animals; due to the clearing of floodplain forests to expose potential gold-yielding gravel deposits. The media repeatedly used images containing comparisons between landscapes before and after the use of heavy machinery, and often this effect obtained a powerful impact on public opinion. But nothing in these articles seemed able to communicate with the same appeal and cogency of the photographs, the complex and heterogeneous networks of actors and positions enmeshed in these zones. I struggled to ask the group of miners what would it take, “in social terms,” I clarified, “to have the same effect environmentalists achieved with these pictures? What should one photograph ‘socially’ for obtaining something like a before-and-after effect?” Most laughed attempting to evade the question, but one of them answered straightforward: “That wouldn’t work,” the miner said, “before and after we have been equally *jodidos* [screwed].”

The miner seemed to have a point. Although, most leaders insisted that the plains of Santander de Quilichao didn’t have a mining tradition as the one found in Suárez or Buenos Aires, mining was not completely alien to the town or *veredas* around the plains of Quilichao. As a rising *pueblo de libres* in the midst of the realms of mines and *haciendas* in the Caloto district, Quilichao had nothing like a pristine past. After serving as a sourcing site for mining camps in the shores of the Quinamayo River, the plains of Quilichao began attracting in the last quarter of the seventeenth century not only a population of *regattones*, *mindaleros* and *trattantes* [resellers, traders, and dealers] from the city of Popayán, but also *montañeces* and *pardos* that eventually conformed along with black enslaves and freed man an organized commercial and mining settlement (Herrera 2009:179-199).

Since 1689 there are records of lawsuits filed by mine owners from Popayán that had exploitations and slave crews in the river of Quinamayo asking that only miners or *mayordomos*, who looked after the haciendas, should be allowed to dwell in the site (Herrera 2009:180). They demanded in addition that black slaves should be penalized for giving lodging on their ranches to these dealers, unless they were passing through, in which case they were supposed to go on without selling their goods. By 1752 the situation seemed to have worsened. This time six mine owners complained before the governor of the province about how the area had been populated by people that were “selling *aguardiente* and other supplies, causing perjury” to their slave gangs (ACC / Sig. 9652, Col. J II -5 cv).

These statements, made by mine owners in their claims, allow us to appreciate the complexities of the emergent village. The settlement replicated the Spanish grid designed around a *plaza* [square] and church. It comprised of small houses made of *guadua* [bamboo] and straw spread over thirteen blocks from east to west, and forty-seven blocks from south to north. The claimants, however, dismissed the streets as too narrow and the buildings as “muddy and filthy.” Moreover, they added that as the surroundings of the villa lacked forests that could provide with the necessary materials for the construction of proper dwellings. In fact, they also demanded that most residents were subtracting materials from *trapiches* and *haciendas* nearby. A map developed at the request of mine owners in 1762 (see Map 18) provides a graphical representation of these claims, stressing overall the proximity with official colonial sites and well-established *haciendas*, pastures of cattle, and *reales de minas*.

After hearing these claims, the Governor of the province prohibited all dealings

with enslaved gangs, but ruled that these new settlers should not be expelled from the site of Quilichao and its rivers. After all, gold production from these mines, and others in the area, was becoming substantial enough to catapult the Province's economy outside the dependency of major colonial centers. In 1850, only a few decades after independence, the nascent Liberal Party, associated with blacks and other subalterns in the Cauca region, will manage the transfer of the cantonal capital of the city of Caloto to the site of Quilichao (Sanders 2009).

Recent history had also other antecedents that complicate the idea portrayed by environmentalists and newspapers of things being better before. As some miners told me, the roots of the present mining boom lie in the granting of concessions to foreigners to dredge the Cauca River back in the 1930s. Writing in 1824 a captain from the Royal English Navy described placer mining operations in Colombia as lacking innovation and capital.

They [Miners] do not possess a simple pump to remove the water from the pits they dig, and when a large stone is to be move, it often requires the united strength of many negroes for whole weeks. If they only understood how to use powder in blasting the rock, or had cranes suitable for removing the fragments, and pumps to get rid of the water, the mines could be worked with great profit; but there is not a capitalist in all the province, who is able to go to the necessary expense (Cochrane in Restrepo 1886:86)

I found the quote in a study published by the Colombian consulate in New York in 1886. Vicente Restrepo, the author, arguing a deep sentiment of patriotism, undertook the study of gold and silver mines in Colombia in an effort to “spread abroad the knowledge of the wealth of the country and enlarge the horizon of its future” (Restrepo 1886:11-15).

It didn't take long for someone to hear his passionate call. According to elder residents I talked to in the region, capital and innovation arrived since the early twentieth

century when The Asnazú Gold Dredging Company started operations all along the upper Cauca River. From 1934 until 1952 the company recovered hydraulically fine gold from Suárez to Buenos Aires, becoming one of the mayor gold-dredging operators in Colombia at that time. “They had monstrous dredges vomiting to the sides rocks and sand.” In the year 1944 the Company extracted mineral worth \$524,984 USD (The Argus 1945:8).

As happened with Spaniards describing the province of Popayán, this time Alaska and Yukon mining men, that came to work in Asnazú, extoled the conditions of the region compared it to leading mining centers: “Climate here has California beaten for a mile” (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner 1941:6). By 1952, when the company finished dredging the Cauca River, these miners had firmly established in the region a technology that would revolutionize previous techniques, such as placering, ground sluicing, and digging pits. In fact, these Alaska and Yukon men brought not only the capacity to admire environmental conditions; they also brought the capacity to change them. Instead of learning from the river as *barequeros* [panners] were used to do, these men taught the river how to run. In some places, the hydraulic power of *monitores* [water cannons] washed down hills elevating streambeds and filling wetlands. In other parts, closer to Buenos Aires, long chains of small slopes were formed while dredging the river. Today the knowledge acquired by local miners and the gravel hills along the river, as well as the bare red slopes of the foothills attest the geologic force of an enduring gold rush.

These anthropogenic landscapes are, thus, not the best choice for a before-and-after effect as the one achieved by contemporary press photographs. It actually revealed, as the miner from El Palmar told me, that both now and before people have been equally

jodidos. No doubt mining conditions and technology were different, but these past events revealed a situation of conflict for access and control over resources not too far from present conditions.



Map 18. Right bank of the Quinamayó River until Caloto circa 1762. The map includes legends for the distance between each settlement. For instance, insisted that Caloto was only *una legua* away from Quilichao [present day towns are separated by double the distance]. On the other hand, most *reales the minas* were measured in terms of *cuadras* (blocks), being the closest only eight blocks away. Furthermore, the map tried to show that the site of Quilichao had very few houses and lacked waters of good quality for consumption. In fact, all the streams represented were said to be *desagues* [drains] of the mines. Source: MAPOTECA: SMP.4,REF.372^a Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia 1762.

Dredgers and “illegal mining”

As I have shown, anthropogenic landscapes and social conflicts came not only with the heavy dredgers, cranes, and pumps of present day armed groups and drug traffickers. Yet, this was not an appealing story when dealing with present day violent conditions, or when making community claims against multinationals, the state, and even environmentalist movements. Moreover, not all people believed things have always been the same, much less that for that very reason they had to stay that way.

Back to Santander de Quilichao, I visited the offices of the community council of Zanjón de Garrapatero, which has jurisdiction over the area of San Antonio. I wanted to dialogue with Marcos, a young black activist, and talk about their response as organization to what the media and the state discourse called “illegal mining.” However, the issue was so hot in the news around those days that getting an appointment with him meant almost scheduling a small press conference. When I first began fieldwork in *Norte del Cauca* in the winter of 2011, Marcos was twenty-one years old. He was full of smiles and was passionate about learning from elder activist and community leaders. As a small child, growing up in a land of gold, as Santander is also known, Marcos accompanied his mother to black cultural meetings where he started picking on conversations and joining young communists’ groups. When he turned eighteen, he got involved with one of the seven *Juntas de Acción Comunal* of the area, and faced the first wave of conflicts with indigenous territorial claims (see Chapter 4), and mining concessions granted by the state to multinationals. He was barely of age when he began his service as president of the *Junta*, but he gathered the courage from the experience harvested by leaders in La Toma and Cerro Teta: “Their struggles with foreign miners, and the aftermath of the Salvajina

dam, were like a mirror to me,” he told me the first day I met him, after I inquired about his engagement with the black community council.

Seating in the waiting room of Marcos’ office, an international journalist was expecting an “official” entrance to the now famous mines of San Antonio. She explained me that she tried to visit an area known as “Dos Aguas” along the Ovejas River, but quickly was turned away.

“This is all artisanal mining, there is nothing to see here. We are not related to armed groups,” she was told. The journalist expressed me that the men posted at the entrance were armed and although she couldn’t be certain, to her knowledge they didn’t look like locals. Her long face reflected the puzzle that this situation meant to the press.

After a few minutes waiting, Marcos came to greet us. He had someone on the phone, and asked us if we could give him some time to solve an issue. We later learned that his wife was about to give birth, but he didn’t have intentions to stop working. Since we were close to the one-year commemoration of the tragedy, this was a “really busy time” for the community council. Actually, that day, he kept attending people until the final call arrived late at night.

When I finally got to speak with Marcos he excused himself, reminding me that he didn’t have much time. “When I began working with the council around 2009, some things were clear to us,” said Marcos, “we were not going to let history repeat itself!” We all have seen the damage that the Asnazú Gold Dredging Company left in about fifty kilometers of the Cauca River, and we knew very well that with big mining concessions also came armed groups, either guerrilla or paramilitaries,” he added. “But we were not prepared to face what happened later *cuando las retros llegaron por montones* [when

heavy machinery arrived in great numbers], they came with a much more sophisticated weapon than guns, they came with money,” said Marcos explaining the arrival of foreign miners and heavy machinery around 2012.

Not fortuitously, by the same year Colombia’s gold production had more than quadrupled over the previous five years. By some estimates, it reached 72 tons annually (Drost 2014). However, the export of gold increased at a faster rate than the official records of extraction (El Tiempo 2014). This phenomenon was largely explained by the proliferation of gold operations that were deemed technically illegal by the state, and by the use of gold as a money laundering strategy, by entering foreign currency as payment for alleged exports never made. “Around that time machines started to come from everywhere, difficult to believe that the authorities didn’t see them passing through,” Marcos pointed. “Were they transported in match boxes, or what? You cannot hide a ten tons machine, or the growing number of fuel tankers that were needed for those things,” he said.

As Marcos reminded me, the *Defensoría del Pueblo* [Ombudsman’s Office] had indeed reported on those days that there were around 200 *retros* strolling through *Norte del Cauca* without control. “You know how much capital you need to have such an army? Each *retro* [dredger] can cost up to three hundred million pesos. Some owners rent it for one hundred thousand pesos a day,” he said gesturing with his hands a big pile of bills.

In June 2010, while doing preliminary fieldwork in order to develop my dissertation proposal, I remember visiting *la vereda* San Antonio. The rivers still followed its regular course, but as people use to say: “there were already signs of

something being cooked.” That same year, Juan Manuel Santos the former Minister of Defense under Alvaro Uribe, assumed the presidency of the country launching an ambitious plan of economic development under the banner of what he called “four mayor locomotives;” one of them being the mining-energy industry. In Colombia as in most countries around the world, except the United States, mineral resources are owned and licensed by the state, regardless of who claims ownership of the surface land. With gold prices increasing since 2007 it was just of matter of time to see this locomotive find its path along the rivers of *Norte del Cauca*. International gold prices leapt from \$614.02 USD per ounce, in January 2007, to a high of \$1,826.00 in September 2011.⁷ It was a development strategy, in fact, already laid by Alvaro Uribe’s admiration, who had pushed since 2002 for an opening of Colombia’s mining sector, lowering taxes and making mining an attractive prospect for foreign companies. From that moment on, the number of mineral concessions and permits issued by the government increased.⁸ For instance, AngloGold Ashanti, a South Africa-based company, accumulated permits covering more than 42,000 hectares in the Cauca province (see Map 19).⁹ In the municipality of Santander de Quilichao alone, the company was granted in 2008 mining concessions that covered an extensive zone along the riverbanks of the Quinamayo River and nearby creeks (GDK-08E, between the confluences of the creeks El Tajo and El Pastuso; GDK-09G, between the confluences of the creeks Monteredondo and Los Colorados).

At the same time, in February 2010 a Mining Code reform (known as Law 1382) passed in the Colombian Congress, threatening to apply even more pressure on the area and its inhabitants. For example, the reform contained regulations that favored applications from mining companies with large investment potentials and technological

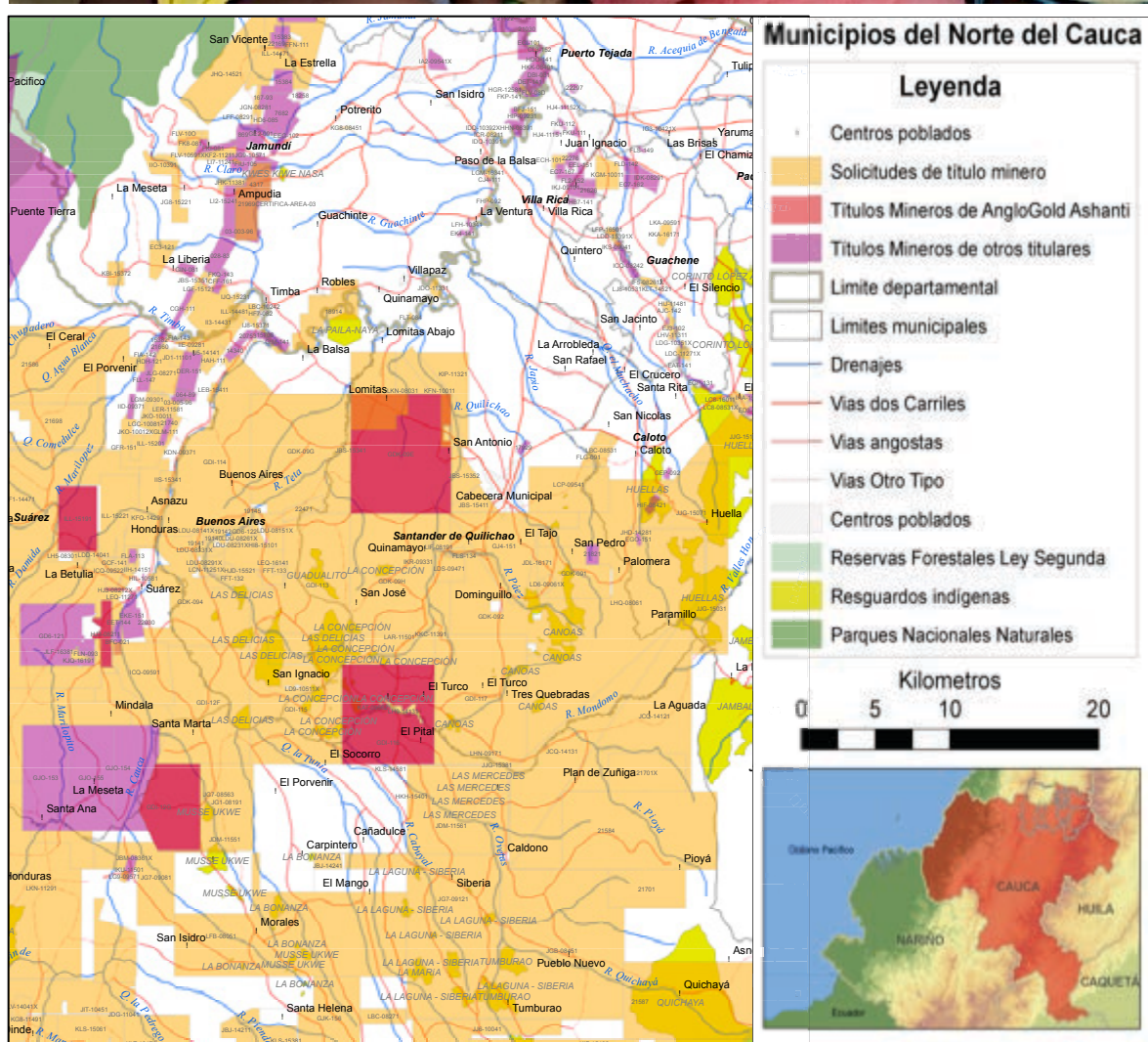


Figure 42 and Map 19. From 2010 till 2012, I worked with other colleges conducting rights defense workshops and providing people with information and maps of mining concessions in *Norte del Cauca*. This map developed by the *Observatorio de territorios etnicos* (Universidad Javeriana) shows a big red polygon over the rural areas of Santander de Quilichao. These are Anglo Gold Ashanti's titles, the purple ones are from a variety of owners, the more overarching orange ones were solicitudes under study circa 2011, and the yellow areas were indigenous *resguardos* [collective lands].

advantages, over applications from local and subsistence mining practices. It opened also protected environmental zones and collective land titles and territories of ethnic groups to mining concessions whenever the Colombia's Minister of Mines and Energy identified such places as major strategic mineral projects. Thanks to opportune social mobilizations the reform was deemed unconstitutional—due to the lack of prior consultation with Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities—, however the resurrection of the old Code (Law 685 of 2001) did not improve things. The previous Mining Code already contained a problematic statement, which declared the mining industry, in all its branches and phases, as an act of “public utility and social interest.” This statement, not only bypassed environmental restrictions and sustainable developmental mandates of the 1991 constitution, but also clashed with the constitutional obligation regarding the protection of agricultural resources and the principles of territorial autonomy of local entities and collectivities.¹⁰

As a result of these liberalization policies, Colombia experienced significant increases in foreign investment into the mining sector of the economy. Yet as researchers have recently pointed out the gold bonanza in Colombia did not correspond exclusively to large-scale gold mining operations or multinational investments (Massé and Le Billon 2017:3). In fact when compared to other extractive sectors such as oil or coal, the boom resulted mostly from the growth of the informal sector, consisting mainly of subsistence mining using artisan techniques and rudimentary mechanical tools, and small-to-medium scale mechanized operations using backhoes and dredgers (Censo Minero Departamental, 2010–2011). Furthermore, the rise in gold prices and the growth of the informal gold mining sector coincided with armed groups including in their operations gold mining as a

complement of the more established drug dealing business. Responding to this situation the Andean Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs approved decision 774 against ‘illegal mining’ and demanded governments in the region to formalize or regularize small-scale mining, or artisanal and traditional mining. The Colombian Government reacted issuing in 2012 a decree (2235) that conflated ‘informal’ and ‘illegal’ mining in the same category. This resulted in authorities destroying and confiscating equipment from informal miners who could not produce the required legal documentation (Echavarria 2014).

“People say, that the incursion of paramilitary groups, in 2008 [Bloque Calima AUC], was the preamble for the mining boom,” Marcos said in his office, connecting concessions, as many other social leaders use to do, with a sort of “shadow state” that paved the way to extraction activities. “Paramilitaries first appeared in Suárez, up there, in the Ovejas River. People insist that H.H., and other paramilitary commanders, had dredging machines and mining operations in the area,” said Marcos, echoing a suspicion that became fact after the jailed paramilitary commander Ever Veloza, alias H.H., recently claimed to be responsible for influencing the elections that brought the politician Juan José Chaux Mosquera to power as governor of the Cauca department in 2003 (Murillo 2008). Not fortuitously Chaux, as governor (2004-2007), attempted to dissolve indigenous *resguardos* [collective land titles] and regularly employed derogatory language to describe the region’s social movements and its leaders.

For the Quinamayó river in Santander de Quilichao, the first incursion of excavators and dredges took place between the years 2008 and 2009, said Marcos. “We are talking about 75 backhoes dredging about 5 kilometers of the river. A few years later

there were around 157 excavators, in more or less 34 mining sites.” With respect to what happened in San Antonio the day of the tragedy (May, 2014), Marcos had a very different explanation than the spell and the curse of snakes, goblins, or ghosts. For him these figures of popular tales represented concrete forces on the ground, which people, wisely, preferred not to mention by their names.

“First, *los paustusos* [referring to people from the Andean city of Pasto and its surroundings in Nariño department] began conducting mining operation in the area. Some local people bargained with them, but also received offers from other miners, and a competition arose about who could offer better percentages. *Los pastusos* were offering to pay at 5 percent, and the others raised the bar to 7 percent. In the end, offers reached 10 and 15 percent in exchange for the right to use the site,” said Marcos. “And there were people who did like that, and they did very well in business terms, but the foreign miners in that same anxiety and gold rush ended up making deals everywhere with the desire to cover more land.”

According to Marcos, such competition ended up aggravating local turf wars, and attracted paramilitary and rebel groups fighting to take control over mining areas and routes to the Pacific Ocean. Foreign miners, on the one hand, “brought the dredger, *la clasificadora* [sorter machine], the water pumps, and the guns. They brought the whole *entable* [a complete mining infrastructure]; that is, we are talking about 20 people: the cooks, the administrator, the chief that runs *el corte*, and the operators that normally depend on the number of machines in site. All these people worked in shifts to allow a 24-hour operation. It was a full established company,” he said.

Then, on the other hand, despite a ceasefire was in effect since November 2012, as peace talks were ongoing in Havana, confrontations between government forces, FARC fighters, and paramilitary groups were not all bygone. On January 2013, the Asociación Renacer Siglo XXI, the first victims' rights organization in Northern Cauca, denounced that members of the Apollo Task Force of the Military toured the municipality of Buenos Aires taking photographs and knocking on doors in a very intimidating manner. Since the end of September 2014, pamphlets circulated in Quinimayó and El Palmar, in which the criminal gang "Los Rastrojos" threatened to kill indigenous and black leaders of community councils that opposed to "development and work."

According to social leaders, threats began after they organized a mining audience in which they denounced the illegal exploitation of gold in their territories and asked the government for support to stop exploitations. One year later, in the mountainous terrain nearby, groups of guerrillas who advanced barefoot in the dead of the night, killed eleven soldiers while they were sleeping. These were FARC Special Forces, or *pisa suaves* [soft steppers] as the soldiers came to know them (El Espectador 2015). The army responded, a month later, with the killing of twenty-six rebels. "But those were the official murders," Marcos said to me explaining that as many as 80 people had been killed in the area since 2012. "The last one was an itinerant miner from Zaragoza [a mining area near the port of Buenaventura]," explained Marcos.

If the *pastuso* miners brought the *entable*, "those who work for the conflict," as Alexander used to say, brought road tolls, and extortions. From gold panners sifting through the lodes and sands of medium-scale open-air mining operations, to large-scale mining enterprises employing hundreds of men and heavy machinery, everyone is subject

to what is known as *vacuna* [revolutionary fee when is charged by guerillas, or a security fee when charged by paramilitaries]. For instance, some miners around began to be charged with weekly or monthly fee, others were charged per backhoe or digger, and sometimes small-scale miners were charged a percentage of the gold they had mined.

Thus, this was not merely the jungle law of tooth and claw. Even within the social and economical dislocations of this gold rush there were rules, hierarchies, and codes that defined forms of association and forms of exchange. What I learned from talking to people in San Antonio, is that big *entables* [unregulated mining facilities] usually allow small miners, most of them *barequeros* [gold panners], to work for a couple of hours a day extracting what they could from the lodes and rocks removed by the heavy dredgers. This practice gave legitimacy to external operators, making them appear as kind people and gaining local allies useful when authorities and reporters asked uncomfortable questions.

This is exactly what happened when on December 6, 2013 a state inspection crew sent to verify the legitimacy of mining operation in the *vereda* el El Palmar was stopped and forced to withdraw by almost five hundred small miners. After having read many colonial archival records, it was difficult to resist the temptation to ask how much this chance given to *barequeros* resembled the “free day” granted in colonial times by mine owners to their enslaved crews. After all, it made them appear benevolent as “masters,” but it also lowered their costs of maintenance knowing that the gold mined in those days inevitably ended up in the hands of merchants (often mine owners too), that offered at inflated prices products necessary to supplement the scare diet and basic needs of slave mining gangs.

After the tragedy, the local inhabitants divided between those who agreed to continue panning alongside outsiders' backhoes, which facilitates access to alluvial deposits, and those who saw the incident as the last straw. In the case of the community councils in the upper Cauca River, such as La Toma, the landslide gave them tools to expand their denunciation of illegal mining as a form to continue struggle for their rights over territory and self-determination. However, in the flatlands of Santander de Quilichao the tragedy only exposed the deep connections between local residents and the creation of informal mining companies and cooperatives, under the idea that this could become an opportunity to improve their living conditions. In what follows, I will show the interconnection between all these actors and positions, which is more complex and has more gray areas than usually portrayed under the reductive "illegal mining" category.

Mining in ancestral territories

Against this background, it was to be expected that in oral histories, news, and public events, social leaders and engaged scholars preferred to define black livelihoods and territories in *Norte del Cauca* as "ancestral." Nowadays, one of the few ways people have to continue practicing mining in the area is by affirming that their practice is done according to "ancestral live visions" and "traditional technologies." As Alexander once told me, people are demanded by social and environmental movements to portray an anti-developmentalism stand, and "we are almost asked to continue doing mining by only using a hammer, a *muela*, or the *escobilla*," he said.

Although, in most cases these associations were strategic representations that sought to contest stately representations, and were effectively used to substantiate rights

to land, unwittingly its use had also the effect of erasing historical links, and homogenizing their internal features. In fact, these representations, easily conflated “ancestral” with a sense of departure from markets and capitalism (see Chapter 2), and focused on ideas that exalted social difference and radical Otherness. Between 2014 and 2016, I attended numerous assemblies, marches, and public meetings that were held to discuss the issues of mining in these “ancestral territories.” I was a participant observer at many of these events, and sometimes even invited to debate, having the chance to witness and confront the shaping and embodying of particular uses of history and cultural meanings.

At a public meeting in 2015, convened by the local office of USAID, to discuss issues related to rural development and mining activities, I encountered, for instance, how a group of black miners from the Chocó Department (including the municipalities of Condoto and Tadó), emulating some indigenous’ political actions (Ulloa 2003), engaged in the invention of “ecological” identities in order to gain moral rights, not only over their territories, but also over its mineral resources.¹¹ As a representative of the group explained to the audience, composed mainly of social leaders from the affected areas by “illegal mining” in the Cauca department, these small-scale mining men and women from Chocó established since the 2000s, with the assistance of a Colombian social policy expert and entrepreneur, a commercialization strategy and nonprofit organization called *Corporación Oro Verde* [Green Gold Corporation].

As descendant from enslaved mining crews, their relationship to the landscape could be seen as inherently utilitarian and exploitative, but claiming identity as an “ethnic group,” and a friendlier relationship with the environment compared to big mining

foreign concessions, this corporation was able to obtain “fair trade” labels and certificates that granted them a direct and differential access to international gold markets. In fact, collaborating with international nonprofit organizations and partners, in 2004 *Oro Verde* was part of the efforts to establish an “Alliance for Responsible Mining,” which not only portrayed as an alliance that sought equity for workers, gender equality, and environmentally sustainable mining practices, but also established an independent gold mining certification system known as the Certified Green Gold Program (CGGP).¹²

Moreover, using the legitimacy of international environmental discourses, the Green Gold Corporation portrayed their productive practices as “traditional” and “artisan.” “Today the national mining code speaks about *barequeros* [gold panning] as the only way for traditional miners to legalize their practices,” said the representative opening up his power point presentation with images of the Pacific coast biodiversity. “But according to our knowledge, *barequeros* are the ones that take advantage of what is left by others; we prefer to speak of our practice as *mazamorreros*,” said the speaker juxtaposing the image of *retros* [dredgers] with the act of panning by a black women in the San Juan river near Tadó. “This is a traditional and an artisanal way of extracting gold that protects the environment, because we don’t use cyanide or mercury, we use instead the same plants and tools that our ancestors developed centuries ago, and now thanks to our trademark we don’t relay anymore on middle-men to facilitate commercialization,” expressed the man in a proud manner.¹³

Held in the Mosquera House Museum, an eighteenth-century mansion, which belonged to the Mosquera Arboleda family, themselves hacienda and miner owners of the former Gobernación de Popayan, the whole event, and especially this presentation by the

Chocó miners, was widely applauded and commented by social leaders from *Norte del Cauca*. But, why were they so eager to buy this story about “green gold”? Even as the prevalence of mining activities in the area meant that almost everyone knew someone (a relative, a friend, or a neighbor) who was involved with dredgers, with the use of chemicals in mining practices, even with the use of child labor, or someone linked to companies accused of laundering money by buying Cauca’s Gold. How could mining become a practice that harbored such innocence and pristine nature for everybody involved? And what were the costs of such representations?

When I asked some of the attendees to the event about these concerns, I obtained a recurrent answer: “it is not innocence, it is political hope.” Despite being a story too good to be true, the experience of *Oro Verde* exemplified for some *nortecaucano* leaders what they could achieve by establishing a clear-cut difference with dredgers, backhoes, and *entables*. Nevertheless, they had no doubt that such strategies articulated and mobilized discourses that came in conflict with practices enacted on the ground by most small-scale miners.

At another event, held in the cultural area of the *Banco de la República* in Popayán, the same central bank that before the market opened in the 1991 used to buy 99% of the gold national production (Sandoval 2014), the main speaker, himself a miner and social leader from La Toma, was asked by a question from a young activist women about “what kind of mining was he advocating for their ancestral territories?” Born in Santander, and raised on the riverbanks of the Quinamayo River, the woman raised her voice almost implying that the interventions of that day had been too ambiguous and ambivalent regarding the use of chemicals and heavy machinery in mining practices.

According to her testimony, mining in “ancestral territories” should only be done by using artisanal tools and locally available plant extracts. She especially mentioned the leaves of plants known as *La Babosa*, *La Escoba*, and the *Guácimo* [*Goethalsia meiantha*] that, when crushed by hand and mixed with water, formed a foamy liquid that is added to the *batea* [pan] for clearing gold particles (see Figure 43). Instead of employing mercury amalgamation to recover alluvial gold, the sticky liquid of the plant helped trapping and floating lighter minerals, thus effectively separating them from denser gold particles.

However, as the speaker and miner from La Toma knew separating gold from alluvial sands was a good deal easier than extracting it out of subterranean lodes and ancient rock veins. Holding the microphone with his colossal hands, he answered to the young activist with a simple example: “Tell me how did you arrived here? Did you walk the 200 kilometers distance from Cali or did you take a bus? Or let me put this differently. When you want to communicate with someone that lives far away, do you still write letters or do you use your cell phone?” said the miner in an implacable way. What the small miner wanted to emphasize with such questions and examples, was how easy was to cast them as villains who recklessly pollute the environment, while environmental regulators and activists that denounce unregulated activities were championed as heroes. He himself had mobilized in defense of nortecaucanos rights and territory many times, and had received threats to his life for supposedly “opposing to development.”

Confronting activists’ visions of “ancestral mining” as something derived from an untouched past, a fifty-year-old woman from the Pacific Coast, named Luisa, told me

while panning in one of the pits opened by excavators that she would prefer to have adequate tools and means to do her work, instead of having to submit her body to excessive efforts of mining.



Figure 43. *Malva* leaves (*Hibiscus furcellatus*) used to separate alluvial gold from the waste material in the “green gold” process employed in the Chocó Department, Colombia. Source: Brooks, W.E., Sierra-Giraldo, J.A. and Palacios, F.M. (2015) “Green Gold—Dirty Gold, Tadó, Dept. Chocó, Colombia.” In: *Natural Resources*, 6, 534-542. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/nr.2015.611051> (accessed January 8, 2017).

As many other informal panners and workers, who go from one village to another following the trail of gold, Luisa arrived at El Palmar with just enough money to secure the bus ticket. However, the rumors of the mining boom in northern Cauca, were enough to encourage her. Now that she was about to leave, she showed me her hands and

fingertips cracked by the ores and lodes and wondered: “Why do we keep doing this job? I have been mining since I was a child. People believe that one enjoys this, but it is false. I have to pan for gold, because my kids are hungry and there are no other jobs. There are days when my arms, legs and back hurt me till the point that I have to take painkillers to keep working. I have seen miners defeated by the hard sun and by the weight of rocks, I do not wish that pain to anyone,” she said standing in the shade cast by the plastic roof of a makeshift shelter.

Caught in the cross fire of the armed conflict in the Chocó region, Luisa was forced to move and relocate with her three sons towards the urban areas surrounding the port of Buenaventura in 2009. There she heard about the alluvial mining areas of Zaragoza in the Dagua River that flows into the Pacific Ocean. However, given the accelerated rate with which excavators depleted these easily accessible alluvial deposits, she arranged care for her children and left to follow the gold rush in Santander. There, she and other five women friends, forcibly displaced as well, ended up augmenting the long rows of people extracting sands and materials in San Antonio and El Palmar. After working for about two or three months, paying most of the times overpriced provisions and forced to endure and navigate the harassments of a predominately masculine world, the women sold their surplus gold and traveled back to Buenaventura.¹⁴ According to her account, these kinds of itinerant miners, were not operating under a “traditional” mandate, neither was this just a problem of artisanal practices vs. modern technology; this was “structural violence” at its purest form (Farmer 2004:307). The same mobile character that made slave mining crews preferable over *encomienda* Indian labor force, and that allowed some mine-owners in colonial times to evade paying contributions (see

Chapter 1) reproduced itself here not precisely by ancestral practice, but instead by force of a systematic inequality and vulnerability structured and legitimated over time.

Nevertheless, for a group of local women Luisa's position was the fault of mining mafias that used itinerant informal miners on their behalf. Indeed, according to a survey of local authorities, conflicts between incoming gold mining panners and settled miners were increasing in at least six other municipalities (Massé and Le Billon 2017:5).

Contrary to Luisa, for these women the appeal to the category of "ancestral miners" was mainly a way to defend their livelihoods and territories against foreign interest. At stake here, as Pauline Peters contends in *Dividing the Commons: Politics, Policy and Culture in Botswana* (1994), was not a neat technical choice between traditional/moral and modern/capitalist, or collective and private systems, "but a profoundly political dilemma of competing claims among different social groups over valued resources" (Peters 1994:220). And the women add: "Over life itself."

In November 18, 2014, more than 60 *nortecaucano* women began a 350-mile march over the mountains to the capital city of Bogotá. The march was called "Afro-Colombian Women's March for the care of Life and Ancestral Territories." I accompanied the organization of the rally participating in the documentation and media productions that were used for promoting it days before its start, and all along their journey to the capital city. Different from other demonstrations this women-lead anti-mining movement emphasized the violence of extraction, specifically the gender-differentiated experience of working and living among mining camps ruled by masculine criminal armed groups. In their first statement to the public opinion the women elaborated on this:

[...] Much blood was spilled by our ancestors and much blood was spilled by our mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers in order to obtain these lands. They taught us that the land should not be sold and that we should guarantee our *renacientes* [descendants] permanence in the ancestral territory. Four centuries have passed, and their memory is our memory. Their practices are our practices – transmitted by our grandmothers and grandfathers – and now our daughters and sons continue to reaffirm them [...]¹⁵

Besides their care for territory as a source of life and belonging, the women's group referred in their message to the land and the river as a "partner" who had helped them raise their sons and daughters: "*la batea, el almocafre y la pala han sido testigos de ello* [the pan, the almocafre and the shovel are witnesses of it]." Among the populations I encountered in my fieldwork, women indeed outnumbered men by far in gold panning. This was especially true, during the farming off-season when the levels of rain dropped allowing the calm and shallow waters preferred for panning (see Chapter 1). With the arrival of excavators and heavy machinery, these alluvial gold panning women were left deprived from this bond, or forced to work under militarized violence and coercion like the one Luisa had experienced. The sites of fishery and bathing were also abandoned because of the fear of armed groups and the craters left by dredgers. The last straw was when the women of Yolombó, near the Ovejas River, discovered that foreign miners not only entered their territories with dredgers clawing their mountains and digging their rivers, but also entered raping one of their daughters. That day, they decided to march and protest until their demands for the removal of the illegal mining equipment were met by the state.

In La Toma, Yolombó and Mindalá I had regularly gone to small-scale gold mines accompanying families in their labor and talking about their practice, but since the

excavators arrived conditions of access changed in certain places. Different from alluvial gold mines, the yellow excavators demolished riverbanks opening pits that could reach about 60 meters in diameter and up to 40 meters deep. At the base of these pits, tunnels were excavated following gold veins. Sometimes these tunnels met with other tunnels and shafts, making unstable the ground above them and making the open pits vulnerable to rainwater and to the hydraulic pressure of the phreatic surface and the rivers flowing along them. This was exactly what happened in the disaster of the mine Agua Limpia, near the Quinamayo River.

But ditches and craters were not the only changes brought by backhoes. Along with them also came complex settlements of various *cambuches* [improvised shacks and huts] usually constructed with *guadua* [bamboo] or wood and covered with metal roofs or fibers of green or black polyethylene. Some were used as dormitory for incoming informal miners, and others were used for storing machinery, or protecting hydraulic pumps and electrical generators. The bigger ones were intended to hold long rows of spinning *cocos* [iron tumblers] that crush minerals and are designed to help separate the gold with the use of mercury or cyanide (see Figure 44). Finally, sharing space with sales of food and small offices with scales for weighing gold, canteens with pool tables and even improvised brothels complemented these makeshift towns. “Here, the law of the miner is to move from the mine to the canteen, from the canteen to the vagina, from the vagina to the ruin and from the ruin back to the mine,” said Carlos a representative from a Miner’s Cooperative in Buenos Aires talking to the press about the predicament of some of its associates and members (Bolaños 2015a).



Figure 44. *Planta de beneficio* with spinning iron tumblers designed to help separate gold. As know as *Cocos* these tumblers and its technique arrived to the area in 2004 brought by miners from Antioquia. Tumblers are filled with water, rocks, lodes, iron spheres, and liquid mercury. Once the rocks are reduced to mud, miners wash the remaining lodes in large canals where the gold, trapped by mercury, remains in the bottom. Then the amalgam between gold and mercury needs to be taken to refineries or furnaces where the mercury is evaporated setting the gold free.

“It was this whole environment that led us to protest,” said a Francia Márquez the day the movement arrived in the town of Santander de Quilichao. She was the same *lideresa* [woman leader] that a few years ago had managed to counter a resolution of eviction for miners in La Toma, near Suárez and fought against multinationals seeking to execute mining operations in the area (see Chapter 4). “Our mission is to bring attention to the social and environmental conflicts that illegal mining and armed groups, often behind it, are wreaking on our communities and families,” she said asking me to videotape her statement as a strategy to bring more media coverage to the march.

Despite the exclusive female character of the movement, community councils of the area welcomed and supported the March with material and emotional solidarity. Husbands, brothers and elders stayed at home taking care of the kids, and a group of young men named *la Guardia Cimarrona* [The Maroon Guard] was assigned to protect the personal security of the demonstrators along their journey.

This security detail was started in 2013 as part of a non-violent self-organization initiative to “defend black territories and leaders.” Several of its members had been actually part of a Human Rights Committee created in the 1990s to face the onslaught of guerrillas and paramilitaries in the region.¹⁶ Named after the Spanish word *cimarrón*, which was used in colonial times for African and Amerindian populations who defied Spanish enslavement (Price 1979:1-2), the guard was inspired by the example of San Basilio de Palenque, a maroon community founded after the fifteenth century in what is today the northwest of Colombia, and also by the indigenous guards of organizations such CRIC and ACIN [Cauca Regional Indigenous Council and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca, respectfully].¹⁷

When the women arrived in the city of Cali, before marching to the town hall, they stopped at the Universidad del Valle to rest and organize for the long trip across the Cauca Valley and over the sinuous central cordillera. At that time, an international seminar about Ethno-racial statistics was taking place at the University. Organized with support from the Ford Foundation, the Center for Socioeconomic Research and Documentation (CIDSE) at the Universidad del Valle, and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) at the University of Princeton, the Seminar discussed how ethno-racial statistics could contribute to a better study of social inequalities in Colombia and Latin America. Attempting to counterbalance “culturalist” models, which saw Afro-Colombians predominantly from an ethnic and rural perspective, the theoretical orientation of the call for the seminar moved towards a more inclusive approach that used multiple measures of race to understand social outcomes including inequality (e.g. phenotype, self- and other-identification, and on experiences of racism).¹⁸ Interrupting the keynote, the women asked for permission to speak and denounce their situation. Taking the stand and displaying a banner with the movement’s slogan a woman spoke to the audience:

[...] Since this is an event where you are all talking about us, it is important for all of you to know that we are threatened by displacement by President Santo’s mining engine that grants concessions and titles to multinationals that violate our right to prior consultation and consent. We are threatened by illegal miners whose excavators destroy our ancestral territories, where we have lived for more than four hundred years. Thanks to our ancestral mining practices, articulated with agricultural practices, we have been able to sustain and guarantee the existence of our communities as *pueblo* [term meaning village, town, nation or people]. But today those possibilities to exist as an Afrodescendant people are minimal. Today, we are threatened with physical and cultural death. We are threatened by armed groups that accuse us being against the government’s development policies. They threaten our daughters and sons, our friends, and our communities. The national government’s rhetoric and lies are a threat that demonstrates the

government's interest in protecting its neoliberal economic interests instead of our collective rights. The structural racism in this country that displaces us and discriminates against us is a threat [...]

Later that day, reflecting on her words and writing a press release, the same woman told me that for them was important to speak in those spaces. Although she knew that some of the academics present that day, were in solidarity with their cause, she insisted that it was important to remind them, and especially remind the state officials, that they were “not willing to let the institution be the ones that comes to say whether we are black or not. We are black community, and that is a fact,” she said empathically. She would repeat those same words a week later in the facilities of the Ministry of the Interior in Bogotá, where the women's march for “Life and Territory,” took over an auditory after the first meeting with state officials ended without concrete solutions. After four days and many attempts to evict the women by force, the government allowed the presence of guarantors demanded by the movement and they managed to sign partial agreements on two of the ten points on the women's agenda: first eliminate illegal mining from the department of Cauca, and second revoke all mining titles and concessions and environmental titles granted on the ancestral and collective territories in the basins of the Ovejas, Palo, Páez-Quinamayo, La Teta, Timba rivers in the department of Cauca.¹⁹

But perhaps something even more important than these particular agreements was what the women were able to gain in the process. Dubbed by their supporters as “the March of the Turbans”, due to the type of colorful headwear based on cloth winding, different local actors and international supporters joined the movement along their journey to the Colombian capital. On the one hand, the women were able to connect their struggle with other collectivities also protesting against the mining and energy boom

promoted by the Colombian government since the early 2000s. This was the case of the inhabitants and members of the Youth Socio-Environmental Collective of Cajamarca, which were opposing the concession of an open-air mining project granted to the South African mining giant Anglo-Gold Ashanti.

On the other hand, the movement also triggered transnational conversations between African-descendant movements, activists and academics that increased the political pressure on the Colombian government. The Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network, for instance, initiated an online fundraising campaign that ended up linking the woman's struggle in northern Cauca with the *Black Lives Matter* movement in U.S. "Like in the US, Black communities in Colombia are facing death, on multiple dimensions," stated the online invitation to support the March.²⁰ Moreover, on the two-year anniversary of the Women's Mobilization, this alliance summoned an "afro-diasporic Gathering of Black Women" in northern Cauca. In the gathering, women from across Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, and the U.S. intended to create a "collective agenda from, by and for Black Women Caretakers of Life and Ancestral Territories."²¹

In addition to these networks, as an activist woman from the PCN wrote reflecting on the movement, while marching the women experienced a pedagogical exercise of its own:

[...] at first some women were shy and several did not want to be interviewed because 'they did not know what to say' [...] but] every day with the action of the protest, the harangues, the denunciation, and the exchange with other experiences of resistance, a pedagogical exercise of its own was built. Each time they gained more capacity, more knowledge, greater strength and empowerment (Machado and Mina 2016).

In fact, when taking to the press, and confronting state officials, the category of “ancestral mining,” for most of the time just part of the slogan devised by spokespersons and leaders, was filled with content and meaning. After the Women’s March, community councils of the area were able thus to mobilized the idea of “ancestral mining” as a different mining category that could capture their cultural specificity, without denying technological adaptations incorporated over time (Arias 2015:262). At the same time, the women were instrumental in the defining of the category of “unconstitutional mining” as a way to counter the ambiguities of state’s criminalization of small informal miners, and also as a way to denounce the operations granted by the state in territories of ethnic communities or Special Reserves, as defined by the Law.²²

As if it were not enough, their leadership also played a central role in the national efforts to demand, and win, the inclusion of an “Ethnic Chapter” in the peace process between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC–EP). “Without the voices of ethnic women, peace will never be complete,” said the women. This Chapter required the State to consult with ethnic communities on laws and regulations of the peace agreement that may affect them. It was these groups, together with the victim organizations, the ones that unraveled the dialogues in the Havana that were engulfed by requests for structural changes by the FARC. With their simple language both groups insisted that the only thing that would repair them, would be that the two parties did not leave the table until an agreement was signed. In a country where the urban population in its majority only lived the conflict as seen by the television, these gestures of courage and at the same time of forgiveness by the ones that bore the brunt of the conflict were exemplary.

Finally, in conversations between young activist women supporting the movement and the marchers it was also noteworthy to see how transnationally attuned ideas of ‘environmental racism’ and ‘land grabbing’ were skillfully weaved and problematize into their local demands.²³ Instead of the top-down influences usually attributed to global markets or foreign states, the women marchers were constantly complicating these concepts as a host of multiple and diverse practices: “You have to take into consideration, that with the sign of the peace accords, things are going to get worse,” said an elderly woman to a young undergrad student making her first steps in the movement by bringing these concepts in a gathering. “Today, for example guerilla troops guard the mining operations of some local small miners cooperatives, which at the same time are allied with investors and traders with refineries in the industrial zones in the valley, but tomorrow who is going to take those places? Things are going to get messy,” she insisted arguing that any of such concepts could capture the dynamic field of struggle on the ground. Another woman warned against a simplistic understanding of these processes recalling the multiple and often overlapping actors involved in land and resource deals. As I will show next, individuals and groups may have indeed strong feelings both about the need to secure land rights and the socio-ecological integrity of their territories, and at the same time strong desires of economic development in which mining formalization prevails over land tenure.

One month after the women’s March, in February 2015, the main square of Santander de Quilichao woke up with the sound megaphones and protesters. This time instead of colorful turbans, yellow and white safety helmets covered the head of demonstrators.



Figure 45: The Afro-Colombian Women's March for the care of Life and Ancestral Territories arriving at Universidad del Valle, Cali. November 2014 Photograph by the author. Middle: *La batea y el turbante* [the pan and the turban] Symbols of the March. Source: El Tiempo, 18 de November de 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-14850015> Below: March of the miner's cooperative from Buenos Aires, February 2015, Source: <http://apoyolaverdad.blogspot.com.co>

Holding a green banner with the slogan “Small [scale] miners are also legal, we demand respect for subsisting and living in peace,” the representative of a miner’s cooperative from Buenos Aires, named Carlos, argued that the dredgers and excavators were also affecting their businesses. “We have three legal titles, and about 364 members and associates, most of them black miners as you can see,” said Carlos to local reporters in the central square, while I waited to talk to him. “We even have an environmental plan approved by the CRC, but now with the excavators and all the media attention, our practice has been deemed illegal by authorities, they are lumping us into the same category as the armed groups’ operations. Meanwhile, large multinational mining companies are granted tax breaks and high royalties in the region,” Carlos contended. I listened very carefully to Carlos’ statements, but could not help staring at the group of *fuga* or *juga* musicians [a dance and music unique to black people of northern Cauca] that he had brought to set the protest in a framework of cultural traditions and values.²⁴ I had met Carlos six years ago while conducting a rights defense workshop in Yolombo, Suárez. At that time the Miners’ Cooperative, with mining operations in the *corregimientos* of Colinas del Hato, Gelima and La Teta, had felt that the best strategy to secure their activity and protect their territories was to continue strengthening the Community Council of Cerro Teta, conformed back in 1995, and promoted as the first Black Community Council to be registered in the country after the 70 Law was promulgated in 1993. But nobody could presage then how the mining bonanza would change alliances over time. While the Miners’ Cooperative had been instrumental in setting up the Black Community Council (Ng’weno 2007), now after the *Agua Limpia* tragedy and after the women’s March, other community councils of the area grouped

under the figure of ACONC were looking distrustfully at the links that the Cooperative had been building with gold trading companies and foreign investors.

Tensions between the Miners' Cooperative and the community councils began rising because of an investigation by prosecutors into a gold exporter company called Giraldo y Duque, with which the Miner's Cooperative of Buenos Aires had entered into commercial negotiations since 2005. In fact, in the demonstration that day in Santander de Quilichao, signs defending the *Sociedad Minera del Sur* (a consortium created in 2010 that, according to documents from the Florida Department of State, had associates in Miami, and was part of the emporium conformed by Giraldo y Duque) waved to the rhythm of choruses and harangues defending the right of small scale miners. Until recently, Colombia's criminal justice system had barely investigated the connections between criminal groups, gold exports, and money laundering. But with the first accusations in 2013 to one of the largest gold exporters in the country, Goldex from Medellin, a magnifying glass was placed on other companies. Goldex was accused and prosecuted in 2015 for exporting gold obtained illegally, and for laundering money making trades with two United States companies (Bargent and Norby 2015). Exporters were not only using illegally signatures and ID numbers needed to conceal the buying of Gold, but also were being investigated for presumably having connections with non-state armed actors who controlled access to mines, sent their own people to work profitable territories, and invested in machinery that they rented out. In the case of Giraldo y Duque, these connections with criminal activates were persistently denied in northern Cauca, despite testimonies of activists and social leaders who manifested that the head of the firm was constantly seen in the company of backhoe owners and armed personal.

However, in an interview granted to the journalist Moritz Tenthoff, the representative of Giraldo y Duque did not hide his admiration and gratitude to the ex-President Alvaro Uribe Velez's policy of 'democratic security,' which relied on the involvement of paramilitary groups to crack down on guerrillas and civil unrest in the countryside:

When the 'democratic security' policy arrived we saw an opportunity to grow and strengthen. Cauca has immense mining potential, the mining zones are large, only the issue of public order has been the cause of the slow growth that Cauca has had (Duque quoted in Tenthoff 2014).

These suspicions were first raised by Senator Ivan Cepeda, who sent a letter to the prosecutor's office highlighting Giraldo y Duque's 532 percent growth in exports from 2008 to 2012 and its relationships with suspicious suppliers, which he compared to Goldex (Cepeda 2015). Since its founding in 2001, the Giraldo y Duque business group started supporting and encouraging the formation of cooperatives in several departments, including Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Risaralda and Valle del Cauca. According to representatives of the firm, this strategy was aimed at defending the people's territories against the multinationals, which often displace artisanal miners (Duque quoted in Tenthoff 2014). In the case of Buenos Aires, according to the business owner interviewed by the press, they came in 2002 in search of the "green gold" that was extracted without mercury and that was more desirable and better paid by international traders (Bolaños 2015a). Three years later, they partnered with the small-scale Miner's Cooperative that residents of Buenos Aires had formed back in 1988. From its constitution, the Mining Cooperative has looked for ways to improve the conditions of its associates bargaining for better labor relations, source of capital, and technological means. For example, the Cooperative helped to establish a payment by the hour system with mill owners, who till the late 1980s charged small miners with 50% price of the gold milled (Ng'weno

2002:71). So when the Giraldo y Duque business group became strong in the region, operating from a free-trade zone in the town of Palmira in western Colombia, some Cooperative's leaders saw it as an opportunity to access international gold markets and improving the extraction processes. As Carlos told me after the demonstration in Santander de Quilichao, "before 2004 we were only able to recovered 10 per cent of the gold that we grinded. Back then, we mostly worked with *molinos de pisón* [Californian stamp mills], but today with the spinning *cocos* [iron tumblers] and the mercury we are able to recover between 25 and 30 per cent," he said proudly and almost justifying the presence of the white entrepreneurs who, with technology and money, are protagonists of an unequal dispute. In 2013, Giraldo y Duque exported gold from the Free Trade Zone for an estimated value of 76 million dollars (Bolaños 2015b).

In the process the small-scale Miner's Cooperative, which had been initially created, to "seek the social and economic development of the community and particularly of the miners," ended up working as proxy for entrepreneurs like Giraldo y Duque, who invested to obtain the titling of the mines and to solve the supply of explosives for vein mining. Tenthoff quotes the interview with Duque: "We found a business model that we consider to be the future, we called 'Environmental Social Mining.' (...) We do not have mining titles. We have processing plants within the titles of the Miner's cooperative, in the community, and in special mining areas. They extract the rocks and minerals without grinding it, without polluting the rivers with those muds, and what the company does is apply an industrialization process to those materials. We take the rocks, transport it to our plant, crush it and extract it" (Duque quoted in Tenthoff 2014).

Thus in 2012, after having struggled to obtain legal titles since 1994, the Cooperative suddenly acquired three licenses (numbers 19140, 19141, and 19142) valid until 2022 (Agencia Nacional Minera 2012, 2015). As Carlos told me, “there was no need for exploration licenses, since we already knew those were good sites.” Not fortuitously, that same year, Carlos’ brother was elected *alcalde* [local mayor] of Buenos Aires. Carlos himself had ran for mayor in the previous period 2003-2011, under the banner of the political party Cambio Radical, which joined in a coalition with Juan Manuel Santos government for his reelection in 2014. Carlos finished third with 1852 votes and 24.7 percent (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación 2014), but paved the way to his brother’s election in 2012. Since according to the mining code, local mayors were in charge of certifying traditional miners in their territories (mostly panners), and granting permissions for excavators and dredges, investing in a campaign was a good deal. Local politics, on their part, usually do not have the financial capital to win a campaign or to pay their followers, so they often make deals with other politicians and financiers (as Giraldo y Duque in this case) interested in recovering the money spent on campaigning through favors and privileges once they are elected.

But the Cooperative was not content only with acquiring legal titles and the mayor’s office. A year after receiving the licenses and permits, Carlos as the legal representative of the Cooperative, requested certification to the Ministry of Interior about the presence or absence of ethnic communities on those properties (Ministerio del Interior 2014). This move, while contradictory for a non-local mining company, acted for the Buenos Aires Miner’s Cooperative as a safeguard, because it granted them both the legal ownership of the mines, as well as the ethnic certificate that gave them the possibility of

claiming forms of “ancestral mining” in the aforementioned titles. Since the Ministry of Mines and Energy, through resolution No. 333, had declared in 2008 1,976 hectares in the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Suárez as a special reserve zones, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have a preferential right to be granted a mining concession contract in these mining zones. Of course, this implied the normative of “informed consent and prior consultation” necessary to carry out the work, but at least, at that time, the relationships between the council and the Cooperative had not deteriorated.

Giving this intricate network and suspicions it was not surprising to see in the demonstration independent mine owners, panners, and *chatarreras* or *ripeadoras* [small scale miners that take advantage of debris and leftover materials from bigger mines] that I have met in my initial months of fieldwork. They were marching this time not to defend black community councils, or to protect their ancestral lands, but to keep their work and their good relationships with the company to which they sold the rocks and lodes for processing ores. There is here is sort of replica of the system adopted by sugarcane industrial mills in the Valley, that after enclosing black people in incipient urban centers, pressured or persuaded small owners to rent their lands or plant exclusively sugarcane to later be harvested by them. Among the crowd, I looked that morning day for Bertha or Roberto, but I learned later that they stood with the community councils, for them entering in the business model offered by entrepreneurs as Giraldo y Duque only brought problems. They earned less renting *plantas de beneficio* from *paisas* or using rudimentary Californian stamp mills, but at least they were not “working for the conflict” as Alexander has told me.

In January 2018, Carlos was assassinated on the road that connects Buenos Aires with the city of Santander de Quilichao. The same road I took descending from Suárez in order to follow the track of media coverage about “illegal” mining activities. Meanwhile, having led the mobilization of black women for the protection of life in the ancestral territories of northern Cauca, Francia Márquez Mina also received death threats, but before dissuading her, those threats filled her with the strength to postulate her candidacy for the Chamber of Representatives for the territorial electoral constituencies of the Cauca Valley Department. She aspired to occupy one of the two seats designated for Afro-Colombian communities, but since La Toma, or any other community council in northern Cauca counted as legal according to the racialized geography of Law 70, she went to form an alliance with the Yurumanguí Community Council in the Pacific coastal region. In March 11, 2018 she lost against the electoral machinery of traditional parties.

Final remarks

There is an anarchic trope in much of the writing about “illegal mining.” At the same time there is an irrational and almost racialized discourse that identifies artisanal-small scale mining with chaos, environmental pollution, crime, and dangerous labor conditions. But as I have shown here, despite its informality there is a great deal of organization, negotiation, and strategy involved. There are instances, for example, of collaboration and arrangements between outsiders’ backhoes and local small-scale alluvial miners. In other cases, mining cooperatives can be formed to secure access to mineralized resources, but once access is obtained these cooperatives can turn to be proxies of foreign investors or even cease to function as cooperatives leaving miners exposed to armed actors and cruel

competition. There are also sophisticated schemes for avoiding government taxes, smuggling minerals, or even laundering money.

However, there are as well complex and undeniable connections with forms of dispossession and forced displacement, which resembles neoliberal ways of conducting business. In addition, the collusion of paramilitary forces with mining companies or trader's interests, indexes the violence of extraction, specifically the gender-differentiated experiences denounced by the women's march:

[...] one or two backhoes enter our territory, and right away we informed the national and local authorities. Of course, they turn a blind eye and a week later there are already 20 backhoes more, and then in the week 80 more, soon there are 100. Then the national and local authorities throw each other the ball eluding their reasonability [...] and meanwhile we, black women, and black men, have to face these people and stop them by any possible means, good or bad [...] putting our lives at risk, putting at risk our permanence in our territory. Two months ago I was displaced from my territory [by death threats] and today I have to return to it as a hidden dog, while others that have nothing to do with our territory are doing as they please (pronunciation of a woman leader in the meeting with the representatives of the minister of interior, as part of the march of the turbans, November 2014).

The women's testimonies express better these unsettling and violent encounters with armed groups affiliated to mining operations. But informal itinerant alluvial miners also experience life as a series of permanent displacements from mining *entables* [camps] and mining sites. In the struggle to control the trade in gold and the labor force that enable its extraction, mining operators have reproduced colonial practices that benefited from the mobile character of enslaved mining crews. Added to the practice of irregular armed groups increasingly taxing artisanal miners, these practices exhibit forms of systematic inequality and vulnerability structured and legitimated over time.

Today the *retros* [backhoes] have moved away —or at least changed schedule to night shifts by the pressure of social leaders, police operations, and media coverage—, but locals and newcomers have put in practice an old technique called *cúbicos*. The name is after the shape and type of the tunnels used, which go down in a vertical line extracting cubic meters of lodes and rocks near the riverbanks.

As it has been constant since colonial times by inhabiting and working these landscapes of exploitation and extraction people have sought to belong to the land, but today local gold mining is transforming itself to fill the disruptions, displacements, and inequities caused by the liberalization of gold markets and by the government's 'mining locomotive.' Today staying above a conflict where power shifts as capriciously and fluid as mercury does, has become a risky business, as Carlos knew. At the end of the day, similarly as the small entrepreneurs in the flatlands around the Industrial Zones were dreaming to leave the 'work under the sun' behind, some small black miners in the foothills were also aspiring to become a mining entrepreneur as the ones that arrived to prospect their lands. Or at least some dreamed like Luisa to work with adequate tools and technological means, instead of having to submit their bodies to the excessive efforts of mining felt in bones and joints.

Conclusion. We don't want to farm no more

"I would like to ask you something," said Ricardo, coach of a local soccer team for youngsters sponsored by a local 'corporate social responsibility program' (CSR). "What would you recommend me to study? You know, I want to study something in the city, but I don't know exactly what? Do you think I should study Anthropology?" he said smiling as we walked surrounded by sugar cane plantations close to the shores of the Palo River in the flatlands of Guachené.

I looked at him and I realized that he was partly joking. Before speaking any word I answered with the same face that he was giving me. Immediately both of us laughed out loud and then looked away to concentrate on the irregular trail on our way to the soccer field. "I really don't know," I said attempting to come up with a response. "Sometimes I think that according to the way schools and universities work, to study is just a waste of time," I replied not without guilt about my own privileged position that allowed me to criticize the education system, but at the same time take advantage of it. "Maybe you are learning more here in the process of helping these young kids than in any other place," I ventured to say.

"You've got to be kidding me," he replied quickly, "you know, not long time ago white schoolteachers in our town didn't want us to study beyond fifth grade. They used to say to our parents: *that kid is more useful helping you at work than attending classes*," Ricardo said looking at me straight in the eyes.



Figure 44. Soccer field in Santander de Quilichao. Photograph by the author.

I took my hands out of my pockets and scratched my head nervously: “you are right, you should not listen to me.” We stopped at a clearing in the middle of the cane. A small house of red bricks stood like a fortress defending its position against an army of sugarcane green spears. I was looking at this epic scene, but at the same time thinking about how to redeem my self: “You know what?” I said, “Nowadays, probably it would be more helpful to study Law instead of Anthropology. Isn’t that what most social leaders from around are studying now?” I added quietly thinking twice about the usefulness of my advice.

“That is true”, he said, “I have seen how lawyers speak with so much confidence and everything they say is taken into account. I heard that people in Suárez were able to

stop the diversion of a River and even gold mining operations, just by using some words of the constitution!” Ricardo was referring to social leaders in La Toma and to the women-lead anti-mining movement that was making headlines in local newspapers. “The thing is that *los concejos no han pegado por aqui* [black community councils have not find support around here],” he concluded with certain indifference.

“Why not?” I asked him.

“We had a workshop a couple of years ago, but people here have other priorities. *Las juntas* [JAC, Communal action groups] are still very strong and if we need something we bargain with the *empresas* [companies]. We negotiate directly with them,” he said confident of their maneuvering capabilities.

Not completely convinced of his argument about people having other priorities, I pointed at the brick house trapped by sugar cane plantations: “I thought that if up there the hydroelectric dam and the illegal backhoes were threatening people to the point of forced displacement, down here in the flatlands the ‘green monster’ was cornering people to the point of loosing their access to land,” I said attempting to synthesize in a single phrase the paths that colonial mines and *haciendas* followed during the agricultural and industrial development of the second half of the twenty century.

“Well yes that is rights,” Ricardo said. “But, when I asked you about studying something is because I really want to have a good business!” he insisted. “I want to make some real money, raise chickens or sell something, you know? My teacher, back in school, used to tell me that I would never get a job, because I’ve always worn my shirt outside my pants. But, you know what? I don’t want to be a simple employee of one of these industrial zones nearby, I want to be a business entrepreneur,” he sentenced.

Statements like Ricardo's point to a central concern at the heart of this dissertation. Not always, or at least not to everyone, the endless fields of sugarcane plantations and the shine of the metalized industrial areas appear as the incarnation of an uneven social relation capable of producing dispossession. To inhabitants as Ricardo, a son of a sugarcane worker and a mother that had spent her life doing domestic services in Cali, these sites also generated contradictory desires for improvement, entrepreneurship, and aspirational upward mobility. In these previously heavily forested margins of *hacienda* lands, where small tenants and squatters retrenched in the late nineteenth century, and later became the center of land struggles around 1920s, instead of seeing entrepreneurial subjectivities as the last stage of a long process of proletarianization, people as Ricardo started to see it as an accomplishment of their own struggles. While for groups such as the women's anti-mining movement, upstream on the Cauca River, 'environmental racism' emerged as a way to articulate and denounce long existing practices of dispossession and marginalization set in march by big mining operations and infrastructural developments as the Salvajina Dam. In the eyes of the landless industrial workers of the flatlands attempting to secure healthier environments by restricting the entrance of big companies was a privilege that they could not afford.

As this dissertation has shown, rural households in these specific areas around the towns of Villarica, and Guachené, have diversified their ways of earning a living beyond the farming and small-scale mining activities so familiar to Mindala, or La Toma. These lowland towns are predominately enclosed by sugarcane plantations and newly emplaced industrial zones, and are involved in economies based on urban services, industrial

manufacturing, and large-scale cash crop agriculture. It was this very same context what led a representative of a local *Junta de Acción comunal* to tell me in my last months of fieldwork that: “Our location demands us to be more than simple farmers.” He affirmed that contemporary ethnic claims demanded them to enact a certain “purity” that not only had never existed, but also restrained their upward mobility and aspirations for entrepreneurial success. These expectations, similar to the ones I found among small-scale miners in Santander and Buenos Aires, who aspired to have their own technified mining cooperatives, stood however in tension with the politics being imagined by activists of the black ethnic organizing in Colombia, and the global postdevelopmentalist movements. One could say following the work of Taussig that, under these new circumstances in the Cauca Valley, “the devil has disappeared or gone underground” (1980:xiii). One could say that, the spirit of capitalism has finally worked its magic creating a new epistemology.

Yet, deciding that these involvements were a unique opportunity to explore what appeared to be an exemption within the predominant discourse and political organization around ethnic claims, I used these instances to ask how and what politics were enabled, reproduced or foreclosed by both articulations. In my attempts to make sense of these contradictions, I learned historiographically and ethnographically that these experiences of assertion of national membership and equality through likeness and expectations of modernity were not new. Following Bertha’s “depth metaphor” of connection with rocks and Roberto’s advice to ask people about mining technics, I learned that *nortecaucanos* have sought to belong to the region and have come to know themselves precisely through inhabiting and working these same landscape of exploitation and extraction. There is no

doubt that there is little to glorify about the history of colonialism, state formation, and capitalist development in the region. However, without obscuring the harsh conditions of slavery, this dissertation has shown how these material histories and relations have become powerful sites of attachment and feelings. Learning to mine gold has made people like Aurora, Faviola or Arley aware of whom they are, and aware of their position in history, not just as individuals but also as part of a larger collectivity and against the background of a broader social and racial system.

The narratives and archival records laid out through the first two chapters have attempted to make sense of this cultural work and historically meaningful forms of belonging, not for the sake of constructing a vaguely specified notion of ‘resistance’ or an image of Otherness, but rather for a sense of coproduction. Differently from social leaders and even scholars studding the northern Cauca region, the experience of my research participants didn’t intend to describe a romantic relationship with the landscape. “Descending” from golden rocks didn’t mean that they were the offspring of a natural non-market economy or a culturally distinctive experience; on the contrary, it precisely meant that they were part of a centuries-long engagement with colonialism, capitalism, and state formation. In some cases enslaved Africans use their mining knowledge to bargain for better conditions, in others mining gold enabled freedom and later self-sufficiency. For these reasons, research participants spoke of mining with longing, rather than with dread.

Moreover, for *nortecaucanos* what is at stake is not a straight separation of the material from the symbolic, of labor from landscape, but an “intricate metabolism,” as Marx insisted, that mixes and remakes both in the process (Marx in Kosek 2006:18).

Claiming “cultural difference,” “belonging,” and “rightful dwelling,” may not be the same as working on the land, mining gold, or learning to labor in factories. They might be located in different fields of power and have differential capacities to affect populations and territories, but such struggles are not opposed as “material” is to “symbolic.” Both entail forms of dwelling, which are simultaneously meaningful and material (Ingold 2011). In order to engage on questions of how to contribute to changing existing conditions in the agrarian world this dissertation has insisted, along with the current scholarship on political ecology, that we take seriously not only the simultaneity of material resources, biophysical systems, discursive practices, and symbolic contestations involved in peasant struggles, but also the experience of everyday forms of labor and dwelling.

Nortecaucanos political engagement with independence wars and their later case of post-emancipation, one in which freedom did not mean a complete rupture with the *haciendas* or the emergent export system, added to this line of interpretation. The point is not that racialized labor regimes allowed nortecaucanos much room to maneuver. Rather, nortecaucanos’ history gives us various glimpses at the production of particular experience of modernity. Their alignment with the nascent Liberal Party, via contesting the institution of slavery, and later including questions of land, taxes and rights to trade, shaped not only the meanings of liberalism (Sanders 2004), but also demanded us to acknowledge the long neglected interconnections of their subsistence economies with clandestine and larger markets, as well as their transactions and the commitments with large owners, legal agents, and politicians. Yet, although ideas associated with a specific racial or cultural identifications were not present at the time, and although *nortecaucanos*

engaged the new matrix of citizenship and rights as a means to enter the nation's public political life and improve their social and material conditions, this bargain should not obscure the fact that these liberal discourses were incubating to some extent the "myths" of "racial democracy" that nationalist intellectuals all throughout Latin America would cherish in the early twentieth century.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century, combined with the Cauca Valley's own project of governing through jobs and industry contributed to reveal a mechanisms that attempted to articulate race, nature and difference. Members of the local elite, as well as foreign investors, believed that that black peasants indeed belonged to the densely wooded and marshy areas "where the sun penetrated less." These scientific discourses, which justified among other things the existence of populations with bodies capable of heavy labor and resistant to the inclement conditions of the tropics, would suit later, when landlords definitely turned to wage labor, the recruitment of laborers for the nascent coffee economy and the growing sugarcane industry.

The period between the mid 1920s and the late 1930s was an important one in Colombian political and agrarian history (LeGrand 1989, Sanchez and Meertens 1989, Palacios 2011). The imagining and managing of territories and populations needed however infrastructural materialization. This time, the liberal disciplinary schema went beyond urban educational institutions, and entered into the rural areas and the reproductive spaces by means of infrastructural, and technological innovations. With railroads and steamboats the labor market and the productive relations diversified beyond

the local scale, becoming central pieces in regional and nation-building projects that attempted to produce laborers that celebrated progress and embraced entrepreneurialism.

Through the 1930s and early 1940s, the Cauca Valley was at the center of transnational efforts at agricultural modernization (Lorek 2013:293). Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that instead of being a victim of the postwar era “green revolution”, as sometimes stated in one-sided assumptions about United States influence over the region, the Cauca Valley with its own problems and ideas, as well as with the exchange of expert knowledge, coproduced what essentially became a model of research and collaboration to other countries. The work of the Palmira station (1928) and later the establishment of a Rockefeller-funded Institute of Agronomy (1950) coupled with the growing domestic demand and production of sugar eventually led to conceive the *Corporation of the Cauca Valley* (CVC) as the logical step towards agricultural development.

The northern Cauca case is instructive here because despite the violence and tension that descended on the rural settlers, land conflicts were apparently played out through public and legal channels. These struggles were, in fact, more oriented by the expectations of achieving state recognition as legitimate owners, and demanding state protection against the abuses of landlords. Many of these aspects of the agrarian conflict of the 1930s, were later obscured by a literature that in the 1960s and 1970s interpreted the peasant mobilizations as part of a revolution against the advance of capitalism and the nation state.

Thus, active bargaining was not exclusive to the nineteenth century popular politics. In the second halve of twentieth century rights were not achieved through the present-day taken for granted values of ‘cultural difference’ and ‘local autonomy.’ Or at

least not “autonomy” understood as a rejection of development or modernity, but understood as a form of interconnection, and as a demand for social equity in access to the benefits of such improvements. During this time, there were also attempts to assert national membership and equality through a tradition of protests and demands not as Afrocolombians, but as citizens and city dwellers. It was also then, however, when some black peasants first realized that class-based claims were not the only way of struggle for rights. These ideas were stimulated by memories of slavery, but also by indigenous mobilizations around the goal of recuperating communal territories in the 1970s. Both influences managed to confront the homogenous citizenship conception of the nation, as well as challenged the limitations of leftist political theory questions, stuck in the language of class struggle. Yet, ideas associated with specific racial or cultural identifications were not completely formed. Transnationally attuned constructions and historical meanings attributed to “blackness” had their part in the process. Specifically, emergent urban groups, partly influenced by U.S. black activism and the anti-apartheid movement, were building identifications with the distant African continent long before the multicultural language appeared.

My intention has been to identify and analyze the incidence of these articulations, groups, events, and networks of political solidarity, as well as smaller events that followed in particular towns in Norte del Cauca, in today’s movements for rights and claims of autonomy. Despite the common belief that Afro-Colombian mobilization did not begin until the “pedagogies of alterity” akin to the 1990s, I traced ethnographically the social processes and contexts that led to debates about “blackness” and “racial consciousness” since the late 1970s. These were ideal sites not only to look back at how

political action had influenced nortecaucano's lives, but also ideal sites to look forward at how, the ways in which they were living, were influencing the ways of acting politically.

As I have shown in this dissertation, the making of cultural politics and rights in Colombia raised as many troubling issues as it claimed to solve. But this was not only a problem related to how state-endorsed 'multicultural' rights were implemented, aspired, or even bargained on the ground. It had to do also with economic policies and changing forms in the "governmentalization" of the space, which were mutually implicated by the implementation of new legislative procedures for demarcating land, populations and territories, as well as for extracting resources and attracting investors. Indeed, as it has happened elsewhere in Latina America, the political eruption of rights and social movements mentioned in several chapters of this dissertation, coincided paradoxically or conveniently (depending on the analytical framework) with the restructuration of the Colombian economy along neoliberal lines. What was common, perhaps, was the acknowledgment that state endorsed multiculturalism, human rights, and other associated international instruments and discourses, changed dramatically the political landscape under which long-marginalized peoples in northern Cauca traditionally framed their demands to the state, or their interactions with other local, regional, and international actors.

On the one hand, as I have argued in Chapter 4, such claims to "ethnic identity" and autonomy, materialized in the recognition of "black community councils," actually demanded marginalized communities to think and operate under the ethical, political, and juridical categories of the state. Prior understandings of political action were transformed into legal claims for state recognition and desires for consultation and participation in

specific development projects as a means to improving living conditions. It is not only that the functions and the internal administrative body of these councils is determined by national government ruling, it is also that they sometimes operated in the ground as new forms of local authority that challenged previous understandings of political action and community. Thus, while some of these organizations are responsible for most of the decision-making regarding activist campaigns, rights defense work, rallies, and marches, ironically during my fieldwork they also acted in some ways as local expressions of the state, or at least as products of a particular institutional relation with it.

What has become increasingly complicated in these processes of negotiation, is the heterogeneous character and diversity of membership within organizations, and the unexpected and unstable outcomes of expert knowledge. This later was particularly evident when, as discussed in chapter 4, anthropologists working for state institutions, nortecaucanos' social organizations, and other activist converged to negotiate the terms of an expert pronouncement with potential legal effects. In concrete terms the pronouncement made claims of colonial inhabitance, and ancestral cultural practices that eventually could allow these communities to avail themselves of the economic and cultural opportunities of the multicultural citizenship reforms. What were back in the old days of militant intellectuals, who supported land recuperations during the 1970s, forms of counterhegemonic strategies, became after the multicultural constitution a "common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination" (Roseberry 1994:361).

Yet, on the other hand, there was no doubt that these forms of power could also become political and symbolic opportunities for those defined under their gaze. In a

broader perspective, while promoting their “new” ethnicity at the political level, black peasants, miners and workers in the northern Cauca have also found ways to defend their livelihoods along these changing political landscapes. Despite the fact that these discourses have generated a context of competition for land and resources that brings little or no benefit in terms of class actions, it also has produced a juncture that allows, in some cases, political and economic opportunities that serve the strategies of local organizations. For example, recurring to ideas of sacred or symbolic attachments to the land, has been a powerful strategy since the making of “black communities” as ethnic groups in the 1990’s. In the region there are currently at least forty community councils and a regional association that federates them (ACONC). These organizations have not yet acquire the rights promised under the Law 70 of black communities, but most of the councils are registered and operate *de facto* with some of the functions defined by Law. Despite the fact that most of the time these organizations “fail” at the expected cultural and spatial dimensions of distinctiveness set by the multicultural constitution (Hooker 2005, Povinelli 2002), the Colombian State recognizes them as associations that represent local populations and as legitimate interlocutors in processes related to the application of various public policies; among them, current land and resource policies. Thus, the land rights and protections promised by the multicultural constitution might be far from being accomplished, but local organizations have managed to appropriate them in order to contest not only official meanings of “culture” and “rights,” but also internal power inequalities in local communities.

The purpose of these discussions with state-endorsed multiculturalism has been also directed towards shedding light and suggesting a set of relevant links among

phenomena that are quite salient today in state-making processes. Regarding the “state” concept, I have developed an approach that understands the term not simply in the senses of either “government institutions,” or practices immediately discernable from policies or procedures. On the contrary, all along this dissertation I have been more interested on the mutually constitutive process of “subjects” and “government,” and on questioning the taken-for-granted division between “the state” and “civil society,” and even between what constitutes the “local,” “national” and “global” scale (Ferguson 2006:98-99, Trouillot 2003:91). In other words, I have attempted to avoid the reification of the “state idea” as a universal and bounded “object.” In this sense, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have been an exploratory attempt to build an approach that understands governmental forms and political power as a dynamic relation embodied in practices, value systems, feelings, and organizational forms. Moreover, I am interest in the way people articulate their subjectivities to share experiences and encounters with and against diverse forms of government. The outcome, I hope, has been a relational analysis where the different elements in tension can no longer be separated for the sake of some sort of scientific dissection.

In these rural and marginal spaces of Colombia “the state” is coproduced indeed in subtle ways, and it is experienced with different intensities. Sometimes it is co-constituted trough educational institutions that become a site for the making of particular subjectivities and embodied dimensions. The ethnographic detail of a white schoolteachers telling Ricardo not “*to study beyond fifth grade*” and reprehending him for wearing his “*shirt outside his pants*” is telling in many ways. Other times, the “state” is experienced trough legal procedures and mandates. In this case the emergence of

liberal multicultural policies is received as a promise of a positive change for this marginalized community, but it also works as an aspirational model or requirement that most of the time can never be fulfilled by larger parts of the population. Occasionally, the elusive nature of the “state” is made real under the ambiguous form of private armies that enact state policy by threatening ethnic communities and peasants for their supposed links with the “guerrilla groups” and for opposing to what they consider “economic progress.”

But, to be fair, “non-state actors” also function in polymorphic ways. For instance, as the vignette reveals the proliferation “corporate social responsibility” is becoming increasingly important not only as a vehicle for fostering an “entrepreneurial spirit,” but also a way of normalizing relations of power. Instead of signaling the decrease of state sovereignty, these enterprises and its extended network of international and national NGOs, donors, certification schemes, and measurements are also coproducing “the state” in many ways. In its intersection with development goals, ‘corporate ‘social responsibility’ initiatives transforms rights into statistical measures and indicators that centralize information and normalize knowledge, producing short-term objectives and limited subjects of rights. This has not only deep implications for relations between what is traditionally understand as “the state” and “civil society,” but also for relations between nations and transnational powers.

In addition, the will and persuasion for becoming entrepreneurs required not only that individual embody and exercise these abilities, but also required them most of the time to be part of an employment model where industries hired workers through sub-contractors. While this was not precisely the case of small-enterprises, as the one Julian

owned, his difficulties for maintaining a constant workforce hired throughout the whole year index a similar situation. In fact, due to the small and familiar character of some enterprises, managers could sometimes manipulate workers for extra-hours or limit their social security rights in times of necessity. Following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) in this high stage of capitalism [Empire] we are dealing indeed with forms of communicative, cooperative, and affective labor as opposed to the more classical industrial labor. With this change in the forms of work and consequently in the revolutionary subject, the division between production and reproduction is thus rendered obsolete. Lastly, although “economic elites” seem to have strong stakes in the proliferation of these kinds of ambiguities, I have tried to show here *nortecaucanos* emergent entrepreneurial subjectivities are part of a series of practices defined historically by its multiple interconnections.

By developing a relational and situated analysis that has remained attentive to the shifting relations of people to the modern state, through changes in labor, land tenure, and categorization of subjects and territories, this dissertation has contributed to understanding how *nortecaucanos*’ struggles and transformative projects have been shaped by the entanglements of historically racialized labor, development projects, and state-endorsed multicultural policies. This dissertation has been eminently narrative in its exploration of the ways of understanding and experiencing life in *Norte del Cauca*. Through detailed accounts of the actions and choices of specific “research participants,” it has attempted to reveal larger social and historical processes. Moreover, by putting into conversation the materiality and liveliness of the environment, with the socioeconomic and cultural histories through which the region and its populations took shape as objects

of knowledge, development, and affect, the narrative has weaved together perspectives gained from political ecology, historical anthropology and debates on the politics of difference and ethnographies of the state. Following these insights that placed emphasis on the historically contingent connections that could produce or destabilize linkages between different elements and relations, this dissertation has asked not what constrains or dominates *nortecaucauno*'s experience. On the contrary, the questions have been more oriented towards what enables them to claim, embody or even subvert a certain "self-construction".

From the forced labor regimes and economies of extraction, that inserted mining crews and *hacienda* workers into a particular regime of historicity, passing through the infrastructural developments and boom and bust cycles in different kinds of products, cocaine-funded economies, and the flourishing of the gold mining sector in the last decades, to present day struggles for state recognition and their desires for consultation and participation in specific development projects as a means to improving living and working conditions, *nortecaucanos* have engaged in a range of everyday practices and discourses, that are both embedded within, and at the same time appropriating these new forms of governance and modes of subjectification. All these experiences have interacted with forms of belonging shaping each other in uneven and paradoxical ways.

NOTES

Introduction

¹ The term “black community” became popular in the 1990s with the discussions and negotiations mobilized by social movements, activists and interest groups who lobbied intensively for the legal recognition of territorial, economic and cultural rights for black populations in the country. Although, these groups, movements, and activists were not unified under a single voice or agenda in 1993, *La ley de las comunidades negras Ley 70* (Law of Black Communities, Law 70), was approved by the government granting special land titles for “black communities” (as defined by the law). The Law included ethno-education programs in schools, university places reserved for members from these communities, representation on committees and decision-making bodies at various levels of the local, regional and national state, a special Directorate of Black Community Affairs, and two seats in the Chamber of Representatives of the Congress reserved for candidates representing “black communities.” Moreover, Representatives of black communities were included in the INCODER (Colombian Institute of Rural Development), the Ministry of Mines, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Education, among others. The *Dirección de Asuntos para Comunidades Negras, Afrocolombianas, Raizales y Palenqueras* (Directorate of Affairs for Black, Afrocolombian, Raizal and Palenque Communities) is a dependency of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice.

² The list of local partners included Cauca University, in Popayán, and Observatorio de territorios étnicos, at Javeriana University, Bogotá. As for me, I was affiliated with Icesi University in Cali, and held the position of researcher and full time professor in the social studies department.

³ For the complete English translation of Law 70 visit:

http://www.benedict.edu/exec_admin/intnl_programs/other_files/bc-intnl_programs-law_70_of_colombia-english.pdf

⁴ For details on Afro-Colombian mobilization and political organization see among others Agudelo (2005), Almario (2003, 2005), Asher (2009), Escobar (2010), Hoffmann (2007), Ng’Weno (2007), Oslender (2008), Restrepo (2013).

⁵ The 2005 census introduced an “ethnic question” that asked people to self-identify as 1) raizal, 2) palenquero, or 3) negro(a), mulato(a), afrocolombiano(a) o afrodescendiente (or indigenous or Rom - or none of the above). The Results combined the three categories into a single “Afro-Colombian” one. The institutionalization of this latter term, introduced a sense that went beyond the initial category of “black community” constrain to the Pacific coastal region. However, due to this later process this category was seen by some activists as a top-down approach, while that of “Afro-descendant” was portrayed as a bottom-up process (Rosero: 2012. For more detail see Wade 2012 and Barbary and Urrea 2004).

⁶ While I do not intend to outline the process of negotiation, it is worth noting that national social scientists, who had a tradition of accompanying various indigenous organizations and rural movements in asserting cultural and territorial rights, were active participants in the writing of these laws, to the point that their expert knowledge had consequences in terms of the ethnicization and spatilization of blackness (See the journal, *América Negra*, published since 1991 in Colombia, and also Pulido Londoño 2010).

⁷ For a detail account of the consequences of this turn to security policies and exception rule on social actors claiming territorial, cultural, and political rights in the Cauca Valley region, see Marquez 2012.

⁸ Conceived in 1999 this “Plan” is a bilateral agreement established between Colombia and the U.S. It was conceived with the specific objectives to generate social and economic “revitalization”, end the armed conflict and create an antinarcotics strategy. At the same time the Clinton administration incorporated the IMF reforms into the Plan forcing Colombia to acquiesce to the IMF neoliberal reform agenda in order to receive U.S. military aid. The plan has continued under the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. For more details on Colombia’s National Territorial Consolidation Plan, see Isacson 2012.

⁹ Critically engaged or activist research techniques have long been a feature of social sciences, especially in Latin America and in other postcolonial contexts (e.g. Bonilla 1982, Fals Borda 1991). In strict contrast with positivist epistemologies, this tradition claims that it is through social praxis where knowledge becomes not only

possible, but also essential for social justice. This type of approach attempts to democratize methods and the terms of the research (from conception to final products and dissemination), as well as negotiate anthropologist's interest in rigorous and complex academic analysis with the priorities of local struggles (Hale 1996). Following this style, national traditions of anthropology in Latin America usually don't disconnect their academics concerns from their duties as public intellectuals (Caldeira 2000, Jimeno 2008). Building on activist research methods, however, requires an acknowledgement of its limitations and challenges. Activist research methods can run the risk of underestimating contrasting perspectives and reproducing uneven social relations and other power inequalities in social movements or groups in struggle. Indeed, by their strong commitment with an organized group some activist researchers tend to dismiss not only internal divisions and differential forms of membership within movements, but also can lose sight of other actors as ethnographic objects. In doing so they also fail to problematize conventional assumptions about "culture" and "power." This has been the case of some national intellectual traditions that frame their work as a "civic responsibility" not always clearly differentiated from nation building interests, developmental, or securitization frameworks, or otherwise uncritically endorsing and celebrating "popular" knowledge. From a similar perspective it has been argued that advocacy and activism usually miscalculates the effects of the legalization of politics and the rising of new essentialisms in the face of neoliberal governance. Particularly, some interventions have ended up justifying new exclusions and social inequalities under the premise of subaltern or silenced communities. This has brought of course dilemmas of accountability both in terms of evaluation within the academia and among the people we encounter in the field (Hodgson 1999). But, for many proponents of activist research methods this complexities and dilemmas do not lead to a blind alley. On the contrary, engagement is seen as a potential site for developing a stronger reflexive and critical attitude, as well as important anthropological insights (Goldstein 2012, Hale 2006, Rapaport 2007, Speed 2006).

¹⁰ Multiculturalist citizenship reforms in Latin America date from 1987, when Sandinistas inaugurated in Nicaragua the first "multiethnic" regional autonomy regime and is also present in the Brazilian constitutional reform of 1988. The list of Latin America states that introduced reforms in the 1990s to recognize themselves as "pluri-ethnic," "multicultural," or "intercultural" nations include Colombia (1991), México (1992), Paraguay (1992), Perú (1993), Argentina (1994), Bolivia (1994), Panamá (1995), Nicaragua (1995), Ecuador (1998) and Venezuela (1999). In many of these contexts, these citizenship reforms involved the recognition of cultural rights and significant steps toward land titling. Among the repertoires mobilized for advancing such negotiations, claims of pre-colonial inhabitation, colonial contracts, and ancestral territories were the most salient. For more details see Nash 2006.

¹¹ In Colombia urban groups have vindicated traces of Africanism and black history since the 1960s. These groups were in some ways influenced by the U.S. black activism and the anti-apartheid movement (Wade 1997:445). In the case of *Norte del cauca* the First Congress of "Black culture of the Americas" in 1977 is worth noting. Celebrated in Cali, the congress gathered over two hundred scholars, artists, and literary figures mainly from the African diaspora. In the Pacific coastal region, the progressive Church formed peasant organizations around claims on land and agriculture (Villa 2001). But, as some scholars have shown, even in this context "land does not emerge on its own as an issue, but is always mediated by questions of identity and culture" (Wade 2010:125).

¹² Drawing on the U.S. style of hyphenated identities the term 'Afro-Latin' or 'Afro-Latin America,' used in the academic literature since 1980s, is finding its ways into more popular expressions and organizations (Fountain 1980, Whitten 1992). At first sight this term can lead to the idea of including black Latinos living in the U.S. ('Afro-Latinx'), but the term intends to highlight the long-term transnational relations of the African Diaspora in Latin American countries and the Caribbean (Jiménez-Román and Flores 2010). Moreover, in recent years it has been portrayed as a distinctive field of inquiry within the area of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (Andrews 2004, 2009, Wade 2006, Yelvington 2001).

¹³ Charles Hale has argued that "instead of territorial encompassment, the neoliberal state [particularly in Central America] has embraced practices of spatially differentiated rule: nodes of dynamism that require active political-economic presence, in juxtaposition to large spaces that are rendered essentially redundant" (Hale 2011:194). What is important for Hale is to look at this spatially differentiated rule against a map of racial difference and to see how multicultural reforms operate in the metaphorically 'empty' spaces as a self-regulating mechanism of governance that constrains political participation in broader structures of political-economic inequality. While, this "logic" is in general terms also valid for Colombia, especially in the isolated spaces of the Pacific region and other marginal areas of the country, the Cauca River valley

serves as a good case study for exploring how state-endorsed “multiculturalism” operates in zones of high economic priority.

¹⁴ Although classic peasant studies and later agrarian theories raised questions about ecologic conditions and material practices (Geertz 1963, Murra 1975, Wolf 1972), linked environmental problems with broader political and economic forces, access and control over resources (Blaikie 1985, Watts 1983), and inquired about the multiple meanings of land and territories (Berry 1993, Peluso 1992), their analytical lenses and spatial lexicon were not satisfactory designed for capturing the subject’s lived experience and active engagement with the landscape. Unfortunately, much of those who highlighted symbolic and cultural processes did it at the expense of politic economic approaches (Basso 1996, Descola and Pálsson 1996, Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995). This has changed in the last decades and most of this is owed to cross-disciplinary approaches. From studies of colonial discourse, to anthropological, and political ecology perspectives there has been a growing concern about landscapes and their implications for the cultural politics of memory, resources, place-making, and emplacement in specific efforts to defend territory (Hughes 2006, Moore 2005).

¹⁵ Risking oversimplification these poles are being used here for heuristic purposes. It is not my intention to underestimate the linkages between the two extremes, or the heterogeneity and tensions within each trend.

¹⁶ Work on “African origins” in Colombian Anthropology has revolved around concepts of “survivals” of Africanism adopted from Herskovits framework (Arboleda Llorente 1950, Friedemann 1984, Granda 1977, Price 1955), and notions of “cognitive orientation”, borrowed from the tradition of Mintz and Price (Arocha 1991, Arocha 1996, Friedemann and Arocha 1986, Mintz and Price 1976). These concerns with what Friedemann and Arocha called traces or imprints of “Africanness” (*huellas de africanía*), helped to challenge prevalent visions of Colombian society as mainly influenced by European and indigenous heritage.

¹⁷ Against the accusations of “racial” inferiority developed in the context of early twenty century scientific racism, nationalist intellectuals throughout Latin America inverted the idea that miscegenation—or racial mixture—to extol the virtues of conjoining Indian, black, and European elements. However, some scholars have equated this celebration of a homogenous national subject (*mestizo*) with the imposition of whitening processes rather than with the actual recognition of racial mixture (Wade 2006). In the intersection with eugenics, *mestizaje* was concerned with securing a white nation through discourses of health and sexual sanction (Stepan 1991, Stoler 1989), but in its less sophisticated form it was also connected with practices of ethnocide (Gould 1998). *Mestizaje* also tended to erase the memories of racial domination emphasizing instead ideas of “racial democracy” that denied the existence of forms of racism and discrimination due to region’s intensive processes of mixture. In this context race issues were claimed to be less significant and dire than in the U.S.

¹⁸ The historian German Colmenares (1983) insisted on a similar critic when around the 1970s “dependence theory” (Cardoso and Faletto 1979), seemed to dismissed in Colombian academy the importance of developing regional histories. “The believe that there is not such thing as national history, but a simple succession of stages of colonial dependency, has reduced the interest on regional developments. According to this believe, an examination of international economy alone would suffice for the understanding of our national past” (Colmenares 1983[1975]:6, *my translation*). June Nash (1981) made similar critics when discussing the “Ethnographic Aspects of the World Capitalist System.” In Nash’s words, while “the advantage of the Wallerstein model, and that of dependency theorists (...), is that one avoids the false opposition of ‘feudal’ vs ‘capitalist’ in attending to the overarching framework,” they also helped to reproduce the idea of the local communities as a passive periphery or a dependent country. “Since everything is treated as though it reinforced the system, the stability of the system is overstated. This treatment ignores other than economic variables such as historically preexisting institutional patterns that result in the threat of rebellion or other geopolitical pressures which ultimately determine what class will be in the best position to take advantage of available trade opportunities” (Nash 1981: 399).

¹⁹ In the narratives about the transformation of one mode of production (feudalism) to another (capitalism) the enclosure process in sixteenth century England has had a central role. In Marx’ accounts this is the tale of the violent dispossession of the peasantry, that finally divorced it from the means of production. In Marx’s own words, this represents the classical form of “primitive” or “original” accumulation. However, this is not just a one-time “event” in history, nor is it always related to the creation of a labor reserve. This is a continuous process of multiple and often overlapping paths. Here, is where Harvey’s concept of “accumulation by dispossession” (2003) comes to play. As Harvey observes, expanding Rosa Luxemburg

and Hannah Arendt, “the accumulation based upon predation, fraud, and violence” is not relegated only to an “original stage” of capitalist development; on the contrary, it is an ongoing process integral to present forms of capitalist expansion (Harvey 2003:144).

²⁰ This might be due to the modality of anthropological research and theory in most of Latin American countries where anthropologists are often active participants and actors in national debates and policy-making (See Jimeno 2000). But it was also due to the fact that most anthropologists working on the region were hired by government agencies or NGOs to produce reports, not actually to be critical about the framework.

²¹ Especially important here is Lambek’s and Antze’s critique and identification of two opposing “chronotopic conventions of memory” in contemporary professional discourses: the therapeutic and the juridical. “In therapy the client may be told to believe in order to know, to go with the flow of her thoughts. Acceptance here is seen as part of a path forward. However, this assumption creates havoc when it is transposed into the juridical domain with its evidentiary, eye-witness chronotope” (Lambek and Antze 1996:xviii). According to them this conventions merge when memory as testimony is circulated by clinicians in the public sphere, for example, in oral history projects. These are considered therapeutic as well as political events (for survivors and witnesses), but “juridical” memory displaces or obscures “therapeutic” notions of memory in these contexts. However, more subtly this displacement can occur when clinicians break the conspiracy of silence by bearing witness to the truth of historical trauma in the context of therapy. In its extreme case, this stance involves embracing the narrative memory as “literal.”

²² While Favret-Saada developed these ideas in relation to witchcraft where “words wage war,” nevertheless, the point she is making holds also to more general conversations.

²² Such challenge requires a rethinking of the term landscape that does not oppose agrarian structures to moral categories, labor to dwelling, space to place, society to nature, but rather sees them as co-constitutive processes. Building on John Berger’s ideas (1972) the historical geographer Denis E. Cosgrove (1984) stressed the ideological nature of the concept of landscape uncovering the connections between class positions, production on the land, techniques of representation, and systems of property. In his argument the term landscape is related to a historic specific “way of seeing” and experiencing the world. However, consequently with my cultural reading of Marxism I expand this perspective highlighting both the “structures of feeling” that actually precede the “fixed form” and “finished products” of ideology (Williams 1977), and the ways in which the materiality of landscapes asserts its own performative autonomy in the construction of spaces, bodies, and populations (Barry 2013, Cruikshank 2005, Larkin 2013, Scott 2009).

Chapter 1. First it was Gold

¹ In colonial times, enslaved and *encomienda* miners were provided with an *almocafre*, a wooden *batea* [shallow bowl] and an iron-tipped wooden bar or *barreton*. According to Robert C. West each mine usually had a forge to recondition the metal of these tools, which was expensive and scarce (West 1952:79).

² It is interesting to notice that the word *ripear* used by Bertha is close to the English “rip:” the act of tearing an object. But it may also refer to the process of copying or extracting digital content without damaging the media and the data. In other Colombian regions, as Antioquia, this process is known as *chatarreo*.

³ Geologists characterize the tectonic history of the northwest corner of South America as substantially different from the “classical” central Andes. In the Northern Andean Block (the Andes of Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela), the nature and timing of collision/accretion/subduction mechanics complicates the classification of mountain systems developed during the “plate-tectonics” revolution of the nineteen-sixties (Cediel, et al. 2003:817). In the traditional opposition between “Cordillera-type” and “Collision-type” mountains, the Andes were understood as a homogenous unit of the cordillera type. However, the identification of several geotectonic units and realms interacting in Northern Andes opened this debate at the end of the twenty-century. Among these units, geologists identify three principal lithospheric plates: the Pacific (Nazca) and Caribbean plates of oceanic affinity, and the South American plate (Cediel, et al. 2003:816).

⁴ Presumed to range from Paleozoic metamorphic rocks of continental environments (about 300 million years), to Mesozoic marine sedimentations (about 185 million years), and Cenozoic intense volcanic and

tectonics activity (about 65 million years), the northern part of the Andes was formed by a complex group of “terrane” as geologist like to say (Etayo-Serna et al., 1983; Alfonso, et al. 1994; Caballero et al. 2015). Photograph by the author.

⁵ Gemila was often referenced in the archival records as Jelima or even Xelima. In this dissertation I will use Gelima to keep the correspondence with present day use in the area.

⁶ Perhaps, the only advantage for miners is that the geologic formations of this area do not release important concentrations of gases.

⁷ The ethnohistoric and archeological sources on the southwestern part of Colombia contain abundant evidence of social differentiation and complexity. These late pre-Hispanic societies included wealthy and powerful chiefdoms encompassing more than a single local community, promoting economic specialization and engaging in exchange or rivalry against each other (See for example, Trimborn 1949; Carneiro 1990, 1991; Gnecco 1996, Langebaek 2008, Drennan 2008).

⁸ Fray Pedro Simón has mentioned in his chronicles that Belalcázar learned of the Muisca lords who bathed in gold dust from an Indian merchant by the name of Muequetá who happened to be in Quito. Juan de Ampudia enlisted him as a guide in the reconnaissance party that Belalcázar dispatched eight months before setting out (Matallana-Peláez 2011:33).

⁹ An *encomendero* (a holders of *encomienda* grants) was entitled by governors and confirmed by the Crown to extract tribute from the Indians in the form of goods, metals, money, or direct labor services. This dominant model of wealth and prestige in early colonial times included, however, tax liabilities and restrictions in terms of inheriting, selling, trading, and forcing the relocation of the natives. It also demanded protection from corporal punishment and instruction in the Catholic faith paid a tax to the Crown. The *encomienda* system was first established shortly after 1500 to organize gold extraction and food production in the Caribbean.

¹⁰ According to ethnohistorical research an important number of subjects to the Inca empire who had been forcibly resettled around Quito and as far as Lake Titicaca could have perceived the Spanish army as providing not only an opportunity to distance themselves from the arduous work in *encomiendas* and mining *mitas*, but also as way to overcome the frustrations generated by Tawantinsuyu. The army who accompanied Belalcázar in his first expedition into present-day Colombian territory had around six thousand *indianos* labeled as *yanaconas*: “This group constituted a hereditary caste of landless men and women whose chief role was to serve the Inca nobility. After the Spanish conquest of Peru, Spaniards extended the name to any Quechua-speaking Indian in their service” (See Matallan-Peláez 2011:18, 28-30).

¹¹ Cieza de León describes the Cauca and the Magdalena River as being one single big River with two branches, one flowing between the central and oriental cordilleras and the other ruing across the Popayán province ([1553] 2000:153-155).

¹² Among other ministers and officials, *Audiencias* were administered by a president, judges for civil cases (*oidores*) and criminal cases (*alcaldes del crimen*), a crown attorney (*fiscal*), a bailiff (*alguacil mayor*), a lieutenant of the Gran Chancellor. In 1563, a Royal decree (*cedula Real*) established the *Audiencia de Quito*, under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Peru. In this decree the Port of Buenaventura, the Andean towns of Pasto, Popayán, Cali, and Buga are included and the rest of the Province (Gobernación) of Popayan are left for the Audiencia of the New Kingdom of Granada in Santa fe de Bogotá. Source: Recopilación de Leyes de Indias, 1680, en Ley X (Audiencia y Chancilleria Real de San Francisco del Quito) del Título XV (De las Audiencias y Chancillerias Reales de las Indias) del Libro II. <https://archive.is/C6mJJ> accessed Nov.2015

¹³ The town of Caloto had different foundations varying from the banks of the Ullucos River in 1579, to the banks of the San Vicente River in present day Huila on the other side of the central mountain range. After occupying four other sites, the town was finally moved to its present location in the valley around 1596 (Herrera 2009:95, West 1952:38, Rappaport 1998[1990]:166).

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that, in 1595 Sir Walter Raleigh expanded the myth of *El Dorado* from a single chief or city to, a “whole kingdom of gold in which countless warriors are ritually anointed with gold dust until they all be shining from the foot to the head.” (Raffles 1998:69) But, perhaps another way to link Bertha’s and Fabiola’s suggestion of Mindala being part of El Dorado myth is taking into account the pre-Hispanic merchants known as *Mindalaes*, who traded gold and other goods from the northern highlands and costal lowlands till Ecuadorian Andes (Salomon 2007[1986]:102-106). This connection, at least in names, could indicate the role of Mindala in active trade routes that connected the Gobernación with Quito audiencia. According to Salomon, in Popayán around 1607, *Mindalaes* offered a broader range of goods:

“maize beer, agave beer, coca, bread, wine, meat, cheese, mantles, tunics, breechclouts, and hats” (AGI/S Aud. Quito 9 cited in Salomon 2007[1986]:105).

¹⁵ According to Robert West, *las minas de adentro* included “the gravels near numerous Cauca tributaries (such as the Teta, Gelima, Ovejitos), were major placers of the Popayán district by the last quarter of the sixteenth century” (West 1952:12-13). However, the Colombian historian Díaz argues that the name was meant to designate an extensive mining border that associated the Drainage of the Patía river, with great placers of the rivers Esmita and Quilcacé, besides the mines of Chisquío and those of the Pacific (Díaz 2001:137). These contrasting interpretations are understandable. As spatial referents the categories “adentro” and “afuera” (in and out) should not be taken lightly. They index cultural and political orders not exclusively inherited from conquistador’s perspectives, but also enmeshed with native points of views and relationships (Herrera 2009:31-32). In the Pacific Coast, for instance, it is common to hear people referring to the ocean line as “adentro” and the forest as “afuera” (Galindo 2017).

¹⁶ It is still today an awe-inspiring experience to open West’s book and encounter an early geography based more on fieldwork and historical methods than on statistical and emotionally neutral technical languages. At the time of its publication the book was probably regarded by most geographers as more akin to anthropology and history than anything else. In one of the biographical papers that West prepared on the work of his mentor he labeled the man as a “Culture Historian” that, “incorporated the disciplines of geography, history, and anthropology to trace the origin and spread of man and his works through time and place. But whenever he was prone to do so, Sauer classified himself as a Historical Geographer, curious about man, his culture, and his natural environment as developed through time” (West 1981:8). In anthropology the legacy of Carl Sauer is present in the work of Julian Steward (1955), who became well known for his focus on technological and social adaptations to the environment (Steward 1955). As part of the Berkeley School of geography, West inherited this interest from the work of Carl Sauer who insisting on the historical study of “cultural landscapes” (also referred as “cultural areas”) as a way to liberate the discipline from environmental determinism (Leal 2000). Particularly, Sauer had a life-long interest in challenging the prevailing notion (among historians and botanists) of low densities in the Americas at European contact. In addition, Sauer (1950, 1958, 1975) did extensive research on the ability of pre-Hispanic populations to manipulate their environment through interventions in ecological processes. He argued early and often that the great grasslands and savannas of the New World and the forests of Amazonia were of anthropogenic origin (in form and composition) rather than climatic (Sauer 1958:105 cited in Denevan 1992). But rejecting the “pristine myth” and challenging the idea of culture as dependent variable of environment, didn’t mean looking away from biophysical and geological matters. On the contrary, it meant taking them seriously.

¹⁷ Cartagena de Indias in present day Colombia and Veracruz in Mexico were designated in 1604 as the only authorized transatlantic slave trade ports, with some exceptions made for Buenos Aires in Argentina. See E. Vila Vilar, (1977) *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos: los asientos portugueses*.

¹⁸ In Cartagena between 1570 and 1640, Upper Guinea and Angola provided roughly equal shares of enslaved labor force, with a smaller wave of captives from Lower Guinea. See Wheat 2011.

¹⁹ There has been a discussion among scholars about the importance of slavery for the economic and social organization of colonial Latin America. Some, more concerned with slave population sizes and economic production have viewed the Kingdom of Quito as “society with slaves,” but others have argued that regions such as the Kingdom or the Province of Popayán were not only heavily dependent upon slavery from the very start, but did also constitute “slave societies” *par excellence* in terms of everyday practices and the whole social order (See Bryant 2006, Colmenares 1979).

²⁰ On slaves as mobile capital, see Hughes, D. M. 2007. *Energy without Conscience: Oil, Climate Change, and Complicity*. Durham NC, Duke University Press.

²¹ New Granadan merchants, miners, and soldiers were in fact illegally exporting gold through ports as Cartagena. The volume of smuggling was estimated by Lieutenant General Blas de Lezo around three-fourths of the viceroyalty’s gold production, worth about 1,250,000 silver pesos per year (Grahn 1985).

²² For Tim Ingold, despite the great contributions of symbolic and discursive approaches in anthropology their starting point presupposes a division of the entire human organism between a cultural element and a physical entity, a social word and a biophysical reality. Ingold refers to this point of view as the “building perspective” (2000). To plan, to make, to build, as transitive verbs, are end-directed. They give priority to the final form instead of the process. They imply the idea of a blueprint. For this reason Ingold proposes to understand production intransitively, highlighting its existential primacy. He calls this approach the

“dwelling perspective”, where production, imagination and perception are modes of engagement with the world, not modes of construction of it (Ingold 2000). Through this perspective, he hopes “to shift anthropology in general, and the study of material culture in particular, away from the fixation with objects and images, and towards a better appreciation of the material flows and currents of sensory awareness within which both ideas and things reciprocally take shape” (Ingold 2011: 10).

²³ The Minister of Defense and a special ascribed military industry (INDUMIL) is in charge of providing explosives required by certain types of mining. However, acquiring a certificate by the Mining Authority to access and handled explosives is quite difficult for small miners, especially in zones of conflict. Allegedly explosives are also diverted to the clandestine market to supply the thousands of informal miners working without proper permits.

²⁴ At least since the late seventeen-century there was in operation a service, authorized by the *audiencia* of Quito, which enforced the use of certain passages and not others (ACC 8070, Col. C III -11 g). Travelers were charged for the use of a canoe, and had to pay according to the quantity and type of goods: “un tomín de oro de 20 quilates,” for one beast of “burden and cavalry;” halve of that for every “mules horses or beasts without load;” two heads for each “hundred heads of cows,” three percent of the pigs and four per hundred goats and sheep (ACC 8070, Col. C III -11 g). According to the record, the “poor” did not pay, whether Spaniards, Indians, blacks or *mulatos*, neither those who where neighbors with land properties or religious.

²⁵ See Alvarez, J., Orrego, A., Botero, G., Linares, E., 1978. Determinación de edad K/Ar del Stock Suarez-Cauca. UNAL. Publicación Especial de Geología. Departamento de Ciencias de la Tierra. Facultad de Ciencias. Medellín. N. 11:1-7. And also Marín, Pedro, G. Paris, A. Orrego, and M. E. López. 1979. Mapa geológico generalizado del Departamento del Cauca: escala 1:350.000. [Bogotá]: República de Colombia, Ministerio de Minas y Energía, Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Geológico-Mineras, Oficina Regional Popayán.

²⁶ For the social and landscape outcomes of the Salvajina dam and lake see chapters 3 and 4.

²⁷ Since the mid 1990s La Toma has been gaining recognition among other social leaders of the region for their efforts to prevent unconsented development projects and mining concessions that threats to displace communities from their “ancestral territories.” One of their mayor victories was against the attempts to divert the Ovejas River into the Salvajina dam as part of the electricity generation expansion plan of the energy company (EPSA) in 2006. They also obtained from that struggle the company’s commitment to develop a participatory environmental management plan, which is now under way. Most of this political organizing comes from the lessons left by the opposition to the construction of the dam back in 1986. Although, not much was gained in those years, many elders point to that moment as a key learning process. Nowadays, supported by the appeal to multicultural rights and international conventions they have even managed to halt the community’s displacement from their land by local and foreign mining interest. I will get into more details on this mobilizations and struggles over rights in chapter 4 and 5.

²⁸ This kind of labor division and organization was very similar to what West found in 1950s (West 1952:86).

²⁹ For instance, the historian Sherwin K. Bryant has found that between 1650 and 1670 only six slaves received their *cartas de libertad* (Bryant 2006:101).

³⁰ For a detail on this configuration and its relationship to territorial configurations see Moriones, Germán (2017) *La Toma: minería ancestral de oro y configuración territorial en una comunidad afrodescendiente del norte del Cauca, Colombia*. Master thesis Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas.SP : [s.n.]

³¹ Unfortunately for former slaves, most of these transactions were carried out informally and there are little records of these titles, but since the riverbeds were now public domain others simply developed their own property rights by inhabiting them.

Chapter 2. A slave ship stranded on sugarcane

¹ Envisioned by Law 70 of 1993 and implemented by decree 1122 of 1998, the *Cátedra de Estudios Afrocolombianos* is an Afro-Colombian Studies Program meant for elementary and secondary schools. It was designed as a way to promote teaching about Africa and Afro-America and as a way to struggle against

discrimination. Recent studies have shown, however, not only low measurements in its implementation and comprehension among students and teachers, but also complex manifestations of racism and the reinforcement of entrenched stereotypes (See Arocha et.al 2007 and Vergara et.al 2016).

² See Restrepo 2013.

³ An early visit made in 1552 by the *oidor* Franciso Brizeño found that in the district of the city of Cali, for example, there were 62 encomiendas with a total of 3344 tributaries distributed among only 21 encomenderos. Seven years later another report by Tomas López found around one thousand less Indians and only half of the 62 encomiendas remained active (Valencia 1987:22-29).

⁴ Other historians have argued that this subsidiary character was not always the case; especially in areas where the availability of *encomienda* labor or the closeness to centers of consumption gave grater importance to agricultural production, as happened in Coconuco in the Popayán plateau (Díaz 1983, Helguera 1970, Marzahl 1978:21).

⁵ Similar processes happened in other provinces under Spanish rule. This is the case of the Mantaro Valley in Peru. See Long and Roberts 1978, 1984. I am grateful to Ulla D. Berg for pointing me towards this resemblance.

⁶ In a similar way as *haciendas* were integrated with mines in the Province of Popayán, Colmenares also identified for the highlands of Quito a complex that connected mines with *obrajes* [crude textile mills]. See Colmenares 1992.

⁷ The discussion over “feudal” vs. “capitalist” characteristics of *haciendas* received especial attention in the 1960s and 1970s debates about the nature and structure of Latin American agrarian societies (e.g. Harding et.al 1977). An increasing number of studies challenged the predominant view that the conditions of rural Latin America and its struggles with “modernization” were due to the persistence of “feudal” or “traditional” forms of social and economic organization. Following André Gunder Frank’s ideas, and Immanuel Wallerstein’s perspective, these modernization narratives were critiqued for assuming a false opposition, and disregarding the workings of a wider political-economic system. For Frank the pretended “traditional” or “feudal” aspects of Latin American societies, they argued, were perhaps better understood as the product of internal contradictions of the expansion of the capitalist world market, but not as “archaic remnants.” Historians, Mörner has insisted, should better take this latter suggestion seriously; for the degree of integration in the Peruvian cases showed in fact a more commercially minded hacienda in the eighteenth century than in the nineteenth century (Mörner 1973:210). In his research on the development and management of the Jesuit hacienda of Santa Lucia in the eighteenth century J. D. Riley (1971) extends this interpretation to the Mexican case. In the particular case of the great Cauca region the critiques and limitations of dualist approaches encouraged historians to question the well-extended thesis of regional disarticulation and economic crisis during the nineteenth century (Valdivia 1992, Valencia 1993). As we have seen despite political instability and difficulties in securing rural wage labor, the region’s economy was more dynamic than suggested by the thesis of “economic crisis” or ideas of the rise of “non-market economies” that “stood outside society.”

⁸ Sometimes referred as *cimarrones* or *palenques* these runaway communities have been described as complex settlements of resistance where anyone who became a resident was considered to be a freeman (Jaramillo Uribe 1963, Arrázola 1970, Friedemann 1987, Escalante 1981). As Price argues, the word maroon comes from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, which referred to the cattle gone wild. In turn, the word came to be used for African and Amerindian populations who defied Spanish enslavement (Price 1979:1-2). For the area of interest in this study there are mentions of maroon societies along the Palo River (see Urrea and Hurtado 2001) In some cases, the idealization of the image of maroons, *palenques* and *quilombos* has served well the strategies of contemporary black community organizations. For example, whether descendants or not of this forms of resistance black social movements and activists in rural and urban areas have appeal to these historical figures as a way to sustain their right claims. For these groups recurring to “traditional” forms of belonging and production, as well as the insistence in specific forms of “cultural identity” and symbolic attachments to the land (or links with the African continent) has been a powerful strategy since the multicultural reforms of the 1990’s across Latin America.

⁹ It was the 1960s and life seemed something that you really had to get out and grasp. I found the medical profession — the medical culture — that I was in (in Australia) extraordinarily narrow. And I wanted to get involved in political things. I went to England to study anthropology, and everyone around me was going on to a higher degree in medicine, becoming dermatologists, psychologists, etc. I had always wanted to read philosophy and get involved in, I don’t know, some casual or bohemian lifestyle? So I guess I just saw

the writing on the wall. I didn't want to become one of those people. I wanted to become, you know, a coffee house revolutionary! And then I got to Colombia, and I realized I was way out of my depth. I was suffering from all sorts of Western delusions <https://lareviewofbooks.org/interview/i-swear-i-read-this-john-cline-interviews-michael-taussig>, December 29, 2015

¹⁰ The Republic of the New Granada was conformed by the present-day countries of Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador. This union named by historians as the *Gran Colombia* [Great Colombia] lasted from 1819 to 1831, when Ecuador and Venezuela separated. After a long struggle between federalists and centralists, Panama followed the same path in 1903.

¹¹ For connected struggles more to the south of the Popayan plateau right after the wars of independence, see Zuluaga Ramírez, Francisco. 1993. *Guerrilla y sociedad en el Patía: Una relación entre clientelismo político y la insurgencia social*, Cali: Univ. del Valle.

¹² Recent historiography of Latin American independence has indeed questioned as the Colombian historian Marcela Echeverri argues: “by focusing exclusively on popular republicanism and ignoring the cross-class and multiethnic appeal of royalism, such interpretations tend to re-inscribe, albeit from a subaltern perspective, a modernizing narrative of independence and liberal revolution” (Echeverri 2011:240).

¹³ While research on slavery framed a great part of the early discussions on racial formations in the Americas, only since the late 1970s historians began to challenge the strict economic and moral perspective that framed much of the historiography and econometric history (see Schwartz 1977, Scott 1985, Martínez-Alier 1989, Colmenares 1973). Indeed, since the work of intellectuals like the Brazilian anthropologist and historian Gilberto Freyre (1930, 1946), and North American historians like Frank Tannenbaum (1948), and M. W. Williams the comparisons between patterns of slavery became the core of much of the historiography on race and racism (Schwartz 2002). These comparative histories focused mainly on Brazil and the southern United States as opposed and paradigmatic cases. Among the questions these studies raised was the inquiry of why, despite the common plantation framework, was the impact of slavery so different in the U.S. compared to the rest of the Americas? Moreover, why did processes of abolition and mixture take such a different course and timing in each region? The main assumption behind scholars like Freyre and Tannenbaum was that Iberian colonies had a more benign slavery and were more open to the assimilation than Anglo-Saxon ones (Wade 2008:181, Mörner 1966:29). However, the almost exclusive emphasis on the impact of different systems of slavery shaped the kind of answers given by the “Freyre-Tannenbaum school” (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000). Although, as matter of fact, other contextual variations —e.g., religion, legislation and “national character”— were seen as determinant for the rise of contemporary racial formations the importance of more politic-economic relations were not given the same weight. Overall, new studies have tended to approach slavery as a dynamic part of everyday live in the evolving societies of Latin America and the Caribbean (Davis 2007:2, Sanders 2004). Without obscuring the harsh conditions of slavery these works helped to show the ways in which people of African descent also shaped and transform the institution of slavery forming alliances, bargaining, breaking the law, and establishing relations with other members of the society.

¹⁴ Common lands owned generally by towns, but also claimed by landlords as their own private property.

¹⁵ Against the accusations of “racial” inferiority developed in the context of early twenty-century scientific racism, nationalist intellectuals throughout Latin America inverted the idea that miscegenation—or racial mixture—to extol the virtues of conjoining Indian, Black, and European elements. However, some scholars have equated this celebration of a homogenous national subject (mestizo) with the imposition of whitening processes rather than with the actual recognition of racial mixture (Wade 2006). In the intersection with eugenics, mestizaje was concerned with securing a white nation though discourses of health and sexual sanction (Stepan 1991, Stoler 1989), but in its less sophisticated form it was also connected with practices of ethnocide (Gould 1998). Mestizaje also tended to erase the memories of racial domination emphasizing instead ideas of “racial democracy,” in Freyre’s terms (1930), which denied the existence of forms of racism and discrimination due to region’s intensive processes of mixture. In this context race issues were claimed to be less significant and dire than in the U.S. The subsequent corollary was that race was a U.S. issue and that in Latin America class was more important. These kinds of images have reverberated with special force in countries like Mexico and Brazil where discourses about mestizaje nurtured the basis of national identity constructions. José Vasconcelos’s “cosmic race” (1948) in post-revolutionary Mexico is a good example of this positive attitude towards racial mixture. In the attempts to

build national unity, propelled by intellectuals and scholars in Latin America, the frame of interpretation often tilted to ideas of assimilation at the expense of ideas of resistance.

¹⁶ Building on Polanyi's and Thompson's analysis of cooperative movements (Owenism in 19th-century) and collective protests (food riots in 18th-century) in England the term "moral economies" is often used to differentiate a capitalist economy from counter-movements associated with solidarity, reciprocity, and ecological traditions (Martinez-Alier and Thrupp 1992). However, I diverge from these views stressing the possibility of finding a story of mutual constitution. Here, I found useful William Both's (1994) and Andrew Sayer's (2000) arguments that moral norms and sentiments "are also present and influential in capitalist societies although they tend to be overlooked by political economy" (Sayer 2000:79). The recent work of Wendy Wolford (2010) has shown the potential of this move for the analysis of rural social movements in Brazil. Furthermore, as Marc Edelman has argued, "in recent years, urban and rural culture have converged in so many ways that it is necessary to consider the possibility of a new, contemporary *rural moral economy*, informed by an urban imaginary and urban consumption expectations" (Edelman 2005:337).

¹⁷ In the Cauca Valley the eastern foothills of the western Cordillera and the western slope of the central Cordillera filled up rapidly with new settlers moving southward from Antioquia through Caldas. This process of extension of the frontier was accompanied by the creation of enduring stereotypes included views of *Antioqueño* settlers as culturally and emotionally predisposed to progress.

Chapter 3. Developing a land populated by 'demons'

¹ Developing a cultural reading of Marxism, Raymond Williams introduced the concept of "structures of feeling" to counter the "fixed form" and "finished products" of ideology (Williams 1977). "Structures of feeling," like articulations, can not only work through historically sedimented and socially reproduced power relations, but are actually "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available" (Williams 1977:133-34).

² See for example: Eder, Phanor James. 1981. *El fundador Santiago M. Eder: recuerdos de su vida y acotaciones para la historia economica del Valle del Cauca*. Colombia: Flota Mercante Gran Colombiana; and Londoño, Julio César, Manuel Carvajal Sinisterra, and Manuel Carvajal Sinisterra. 2016. *Manuel Carvajal Sinisterra: una vida dedicada a generar progreso con equidad*.

³ The sack was interpreted as popular liberals' revenge on the conservative aristocracy of the city. However, black peasants and poor residents also pillaged many wealthy liberals in an attempt to recover back payments they had not received. The rioters also burgled the churches, the banks, and merchants' shops.

⁴ The spatial organization of politics and the economy during colonial times provided the context in which regional markers and categorizations began to be deployed in the nineteenth century for mapping the newly independent nation. In these emerging representation Antioquia and its inhabitants emerged as industrious, orderly, and peaceful, while Caucaños appeared lazy, violent, and morally inferior. For more on the racial aspects of the Regeneration, see Nancy Appelbaum, "Remembering Riosucio: Race, Region, and Community in Colombia, 1850-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997), 275, 326-327.

⁵ Modern mapping techniques have historically played a crucial role in enabling colonial and postcolonial social orders to construct, organize, and regulate lands and societies, and to transform them into governable spaces and populations (see Orlove 1993, Craib 2004, Appelbaum 2016, Rocheleau 1995, Foucault 2003, Wood 2010). What maps have addressed and the way they have been deployed by state officials, politicians, and in everyday practices, actually reveals the process by which this technology has worked to rationalize and legitimize relations of power. However, this interpretation fails to show how these technologies can also become political and symbolic opportunities for those defined under these categories, it fails to account how people navigate and appropriate them. The history of the spatial creation of Siam's nationhood developed by Thongchai Winichakul (1994) is perhaps a good example of this possibility. As Winichakul argues, although the "geo-body" of the nation is created through new official categorizations

and imaginaries of both citizens and land that simultaneously produces a material and symbolic object, Siam was not a passive victim of colonialism, but an active player capable of taking advantage of colonial technologies and discourses. In his analysis of the production of Kaereszi's colonial "geo-body" Donald Moore has shown that governments, whether colonial or postcolonial, have not managed to have things all its own way. The attempts to fix spatially and culturally ethnic identities have failed to recognize the complex dynamic through which subjects create what Moore (2005) has called different spatial sensitivities and micro-practices of place. In converse terms, not only "local" cultural processes render places meaningful. They are not cordoned off from other forms of knowledge, signifying practices, and politic economic processes. Moreover, Moore does not rely on a "self-sovereign subject" whose sole intentions are capable of articulating all these forces. For all these reasons, an analytic of "entanglement" and "articulated assemblages" in the formation of landscapes and populations becomes necessary. Here, multiple spatialities take shape in translocal and provisional articulations: "place emerges as a distinctive mixture, not as an enduring essence" (Moore 2005:20).

⁶ The Regeneration movement conformed by Liberals and Conservatives who were disenchanted with the "anarchy" resulting from the Radicals' federalism, sought to reduce popular political participation and to strength state power. A key leader of the movement was Rafael Núñez, who was elected president in 1879 and held the office until 1882. However, it is also important to understand the "violence of representation" inherent to the narrative of civilization, and the key roles it played in the formation of both, the nation and the processes of capitalist development. In this respect Cristina Rojas (2002) has made clear for the case of Colombia, how "the process that made "civilization" an element of the national self-consciousness of the West was the same process that authorized violence in the name of civilization" (Rojas 2002:xiii).

⁷ The original text in Spanish is transcribed here: *¡Riquezas inútiles, entre las cuales vivimos pobres! Esa antítesis, díjele, no puede pasar de una exageración. No, me repuso, ni hay para qué ni con quiénes explotarlas. ¿Quién consume lo que puede producir mi hacienda, aquí donde tenemos que derramar la miel para que no se avinagre en las canoas, donde el maíz sirve de pasto a los gorgojos, y las frutas se caen de los árboles porque no hay quien las coja? ¿Aquí donde los jornales tienen que pagarse miserablemente y los que por ellos se conciertan trabajan un día y huelgan un mes, donde no hay industrias que recíprocamente se ayuden, donde cada cual cultiva lo que necesita para su familia y tiene con esto satisfechas las necesidades de su vida inerme? [...] Pero convierta usted la miel en azúcar, haga tercios de su maíz y llévelos a Buga, a Cali [...] Y en Buga y Cali se quedarían almacenados y perdería los costos de producción y transporte. Productos sobran, consumidores faltan* (Pombo 1866:236).

⁸ The Peruvianist literature on race and geography has long ago pointed to the importance of images of order defined by the temporal, spatial, and disciplinary boundary of disciplines as geography in the construction of the nation. As Benjamin Orlove (1993) has insisted, both Spanish colonial and independent republican periods in Peru suggests that the distinct images of order is not a reflection of the underlying order of geographical phenomena, but a products of the specific social, cultural, and political contexts in which these geographies developed. "Colonial orderings emphasized historicized racial differences among persons within a relatively balanced and homogeneous space, while postcolonial orderings stressed naturalized regional differences among places within a homogeneous, though covertly racialized, population" (Orlove 1993:301). In contemporary multicultural Peru, the anthropologist Shane Greene has argued that state endorsed policies have not only "ordered" geographically its multicultural subjects, but also have established a sort of hierarchy within the multicultural imagination: Andeans, Amazonians, and Afro-Peruvians (Greene 2007).

⁹ Along the trails, a telegraph line was also established.

¹⁰ The initial contract established with *The Cauca Valley Mining Constructing Company* in 1874 intended to grant a concession for a term of sixty years. The service would consist of at least two locomotives and thirty cars; each one of these locomotives with sufficient power to move up at four per cent grade and with a velocity of fifteen kilometers (9 miles) an hour. The cars for passengers, of first and second-class, were assured to be at least equal in quality to those on the Panama Railroad (The Cauca Valley Mining Constructing Company 1874:9-11).

¹¹ The mediation of the United States would be related to its interest in the construction of the Panama Canal, and its later separation from Colombia in 1903.

¹² However, in spite of the enormous efforts of these projects for the country, Colombia occupied, at the end of the nineteenth century, the sixteenth place among 19 Latin American countries in terms of railway kilometers of per capita built (Londoño 2013).

¹³ For the configuration of the modern Cauca Valley see Almario 2013.

¹⁴ With the construction of the Salvajina lake and dam, the municipality of Buenos Aires lost administratively its northwestern part to Suárez, which not only passed to be a new municipality in 1989, but also acquired due to the new road (built with the construction of the dam) a new centrality as market and trading post. This led to a gradual disconnection with Buenos Aires.

¹⁵ In present time, the title Don or Doña does not necessary denotes nobility or socioeconomic status, as did during colonial times. In the countryside of Colombia, among peasants and rural workers these titles are used frequently as a manner of showing respect to elders or certain people.

¹⁶ The Spanish original is transcribed here: “*Con el fango hasta las corazas llegamos al río Cauca, donde los zancudos nos dieron música y aguijo-nazos por más de dos horas, que gastamos en ablandar el corazón del hombre más adusto y descomedido que registran los anales de los paleros (...). Por la mucha arena que arrastran las aguas del Cauca y que acumulándose ha debido levantar el lecho del río, parece que no guarda la conveniente nivelación con el valle; así es que rebosa sobre sus márgenes y represa todos sus afluentes. Originanse de aquí los pantanos que hacen mortíferas sus orillas y las grandes inundaciones a que obliga a sus tributarios en casi toda su longitud*” (Pombo 1866:237).

¹⁷ The Spanish original is transcribed here: *Difícil dar con el vado; pero observando la vegetación, reconocí las orillas del río por las ingas, sagitarias, ginesias, diefanbaquias y heliconias que crecen en ellas formando una espesura. Por otra parte el camino de la derecha del Cauca que viene de Zelandia atraviesa el río Jamundí cerca del Paso de Sifiente por un elegante puente que logramos descubrir en medio de una frondosa espesura de cañas de bambu de veinte metros de altura. Sus flexibles ramajes están cuajados de grandes monos colorados que nos contemplan familiarmente, a diez pasos de distancia, haciendo muecas y contorsiones. (...) A la vegetación de gramíneas que predomina en las lomas suceden las espesas frondas de la llanura inundada, y durante horas enteras erramos a través de inextricables pantanos, cubiertos de grandes jusievas de hojas de sauce, melástomos morados, cañas de bambu, arundináceas variadas y helechos acuáticos. A cada paso nos atascamos y a veces el agua nos llega al cuello. Por último divisamos una porción de montículos que nos ayudan a dar con una pista para salir de aquellos malditos atolladeros* (Wiener, Crevaux, D. Charnay, etc. 1884:714-717)

¹⁸ In this respect, David Hughes’s work along the Mozambique-Zimbabwe frontier (2006) is an important contribution to understand how “high-minded” environmental interventions allowed the enclosure and commoditization of black lowlands restricting their right to farm. This new form of colonization buttressed by liberal conservationists and developers did not only give shape to a new governable space, but also opened a new frontier. Thus, a key issue in these analyses is the attention to the development of a sort of “governmental rationality” and a “liberal project.” Tania Li (2007) has been especially concerned with the ways in which government programs “render technical,” aspects of landscapes and livelihoods. Exploring environmental rule in Indonesia, she describes a liberal “will to improve,” rooted in a historically complex situations and contradictory practices (Li 2007: 270). Yet, as we will see in chapter 4 these practices have limits and can be converted into a terrain of contestation and maneuver for local groups.

¹⁹ For a similar analysis of the role of local elites and state power in the flood control program of the United States see Karen O’Neill 2006.

²⁰ It is worth mentioning that Chardon was Chancellor of the University and Puerto Rico when the massacre of Río Piedras occurred, after a confrontation between independent students and those who supported Chardon. I am thankful to Ulla D. Berg for pointing me to this connection.

²¹ Since the late 1980s “La Broca” [coffee berry borer], a small beetle native to Africa, reduced the coffee production below 20% of its original average. Due to this pest the Federation of Coffee Growers (FEDECAGE) dropped assistance to areas in Norte del Cauca terming them “marginal” compared to the high production areas in Caldas, Risaralda and Antioquia.

²² James Scott, in his work on Southeast Asia’s “self-governing” peoples and peasant communities, has argued that certain “frictions of terrain,” like particular crops and mountains can place difficulties for state-making processes and challenges to capital accumulation (Scott 2009). In similar vein, Bruce Braun has argued, that specific biophysical features can “resists its incorporation into particular political economic and spatial forms” (Braun 2008:668).

²³ Since the 1930s, Colombian governments have addressed problems of agrarian structure several times and in different ways, always against a backdrop of high levels of rural conflict and violence. The next period of activity in this area occurred in the 1960s and the early 1970s (see Chapter 4).

²⁴ With the consecutive liberal governments between 1930-1946, whose modernization project was characterized by the emphasis on the consolidation of the state, the new liberal republic emphasized a new popular character as the basis of nationality. This discourse was allowed by a new educational strategy, which among other things attempted to “recovery” the indigenous legacy. In his history of social research in Colombia, Jaime Arocha states (1980: 46-51) that during this period the social sciences in the country were professionalized. The different faculties of Higher Education ceased to belong to government ministries and passed to the National University and the *Escuela Normal Superior*. These institutions were further strengthened by the immigration of European scientists and professors who arrived in the country fleeing the political persecution unleashed in the old continent. Gregorio Hernández de Alba, pioneer of anthropological studies in the country, founded also around this time The National Archaeological Service that would launch the Commission of *Cultura Aldeana* aiming to replicate some of the goals of the choreographic commission, but this time offering thanks to social research, a better knowledge about the rural country. In 1941 Hernández de Alba was instrumental in the appointment of the French ethnologist Paul Rivet as the director of the new *Instituto Etnológico Nacional*, which trained the first professional anthropologist and social scientist in Colombia. In 1946 Hernández de Alba replicated these efforts in the Cauca department conforming the *Instituto Etnológico del Cauca*, but soon his interest in indigenism and applied research at the service of the agrarian struggles of the time distanced him from the narrow scientific conceptions of Rivet. For a detail study of the “Liberal Republic” see Bushnell, D. 1993. *The making of modern Colombia. A nation in spite of itself*. Berkeley y Los Angeles: University of California Press. For more on the figure of Hernández de Alba and the history of anthropology in Colombia see Perry, J. 2006. *Caminos de la Antropología en Colombia*. Universidad de lo Andes. Bogotá. See also Rodríguez Jenny Marcela 2016, Gregorio Hernández de Alba (1904-1973). *Su contribución al pensamiento indigenista y antropológico colombiano*, Ed. Universidad Nacional.

²⁵ Portrayed by the Colombian government as a “communist” strike, the United States government threatened to intervene if the Colombian officials did not act in benefit of the United Fruit Company. Between the 5th and 6th of December of 1928, strikers were massacre by an army regiment sent from the capital city Bogotá. Gaitán defended the workers’ rights and called for accountability to those involved in the killing. Gaitán won the 1930 presidential election formally rejoining the Liberal Party in 1935. For more on the economy and culture in a United Fruit Company Banana Enclave in Colombia, see Le Grand 1998.

²⁶ The Spanish text reads as follows: “La vereda está sumida en el susto más angustiante que jamás haya tenido. Que con esta bendita suerte que tuvo el liberalismo, que los godos nos redujeron como diablos en el abismo. Y más con la persecución de la nombrada policía militar la gente ni come ni duerme porque a estos si les temen. Se habían oído los estragos de estos diablos fatales recorriendo el territorio y a las gentes haciendo males. Atormentando a nuestros grandes jefes, también a la sociedad, vaya porque con el simple hecho de ser rojo se va uno a dormir a la paja.”

²⁷ These events, stemming from the long conflict between the Conservative and Liberal parties, triggered a period of escalating violence in the Colombian countryside, a time that came to be known as *La Violencia* (1948-1958). Between 1948 and 1953 alone 144,548 people were murdered in Colombia. In 1948 there were over 43,000 homicides and in 1950 over 50,000. The outburst of generalized violence was magnified by “semantics of political terror” that included the dismemberment of victims and the displacement of entire towns throughout the countryside. For details on this civil war see Orlando Fals Borda, Monseñor Germán Guzmán, Eduardo Umaña Luna. *La violencia en Colombia*. Editorial Taurus, 2005. For an anthropological study of the massacres as “sacrificial manifestations” see María Victoria Uribe, *Matar, rematar y contramatar: Las masacres de La Violencia en el Tolima, 1948–1964*, Bogotá: CINEP, 1990.

²⁸ Tall trees provided not only shadow and natural compost for cacao and coffee trees, but also served as a way to lessen labor force since the shadow permitted fewer weeds to thrive and required almost non-irrigation. Roaming animals complemented the system keeping bugs and insects under control and adding further nutrients to the soil.

²⁹ Among the cases the reader can be referred to an initiative carried out by the “Corporation for Development and Peace of the Valle and Cauca regions” (*Vallenpaz*) that has focused on the promotion of productive projects and the formation of “rural entrepreneurs.” This is a “civil” organization tied to regional political and economic elites in the Cauca Valley in south of Colombia. For more details see Rettberg 2004 and Porras et.al 2012.

³⁰ For an ethnographical exploration on the devastating effects of these avalanches and how they profoundly altered the lives of Belalcázar's inhabitants in the Páez region see Cagueñas 2014.

³¹ Income and import tax exemptions were determined by the following rule: One hundred percent for pre-established or new companies established between June 21, 1994 and June 20 June 1999; fifty percent for those who settled between June 21, 1999 and June 20, 2001; and twenty-five percent for those established between June 21, 2001 and June 20, 2003. The exemptions would apply for a period of ten years and applied to the following productive sectors: Agricultural and Livestock, commercial establishments, Microenterprises, Industrial, Tourism, exporting and mining companies (not related to the exploration or exploitation of hydrocarbons).

³² In the Cauca department the Law initially included the municipalities of Caldon, Inzá, Jambaló, Toribío, Caloto, Totoró, Silvia, Páez, Santander de Quilichao, Popayán, Miranda, Morales, Padilla, Puracé, Tambo, Timbío and Suárez. For the Huila department, the zone of influence of the Law corresponded to the municipalities of: La Plata, Paicol, Yaguará, Nátaga, Iquira, Tesalia, Neiva, Aipe, Campoalegre, Gigante, Hobo, Rivera and Villavieja. This geographical coverage was later increased by means of article 42 of Law 383 of 1997 adding the following municipalities: Cajibío, Piendamó, Sotará, Buenos Aires, La Sierra, Puerto Tejada, Corinto and Patía. In Huila, the new municipalities included: Acevedo, La Argentina, Palermo, Pitalito, Tello, Teruel, San Agustín, Algeciras and Garzón. Despite this wide coverage of the Law, the northern Cauca region, given its proximity with the economic centers of the Cauca Valley, ended up concentrating most entrepreneur initiatives. See Alonso y Lotero 2006.

³³ The 'entrepreneur' represents neoliberal ideal subject. In other words, it is the utopian actor that embodies the economic theory that neoliberalism proclaims: always prepare to adapt to shifting situations, capable of mobility, flexibility, willing to innovate, and overall able to take risks. This "system of dispositions," as Bourdieu (2011 [1972]) would argue, organizes action and constructs worldviews. However, as it has been said about neoliberalism, entrepreneurialism is far from a uniform doctrine and can actually become an obstacle to ethnographic understanding (Eriksen et al. 2015). From an anthropological point of view, neoliberalism's diffuse system of power demands us, indeed, to go beyond traditional and teleological explanations that understands its processes mainly as a consequence of the imposition of structural adjustment policies. Not only on large actors and institutions, but also local individuals engage in a range of activities, affects, and discourses that are both embedded within and at the same time transforming the practices of late capitalism (Freeman 2014, Ramos-Zayas 2011, Molé 2008). Despite these cautions, it is difficult to disguise that the resemblances of "actually existing" subjects and regimes is quite striking (Gledhill 2004: 342). See for example, Carla Freeman's (2000, 2014) discussion of women entrepreneurs in Barbados.

³⁴ In 1999, after similar demonstrations by Nasa indigenous groups from Toez, the governor of Cauca mandated the employment of six indigenous members in the industrial area in Caloto (see Gow 2008:166).

³⁵ Constituted in 1982 by the Institute of Industrial Development (IFI by its Spanish acronym), the National Federation of Coffee Growers, the Grancolombiano group (a banking and national investment group), and international investors, Papelcol's primary purpose was to regulate the paper market in Colombia controlling the monopoly of production. Specifically, its objective was to counterweight the role of the *Productora de Papeles S.A.* (Propal), a subsidiary of the American firms International Paper Company and Grace who established in the country since 1960s. But the state project failed due to the collapse of the Grancolombiano group and the determination of foreign investors not to continue funding Papelcol. As a result Propal acquired 70.1 percent of the shares, leaving IFI with only 21.5 and reserving the other 8.4 for potential investors (El Tiempo 1991)

³⁶ Encouraged by the generalized civic protests that erupted in 1980s in the region, residents recalled how in 1992 municipal councilors and accountability local committees (*Comités de Veeduría y participación comunitaria*) submitted an *acción de tutela* [expedite procedure for demanding protection of fundamental social rights] against Propal and the sugarcane industrial mill La Cabaña for polluting the river. The Colombian state acknowledged the responsibility of these companies and included the CVC as part of the problem for not enforcing the proper environmental measures.

Chapter 4. From land to territory

¹ It is traced over a colonial trade route that connected Spain with the *Gobernación de Popayán*, via Panamá and the port of Buenaventura in the Pacific Ocean passing through Cali in the Cauca Valley (Cieza de Leon [xvi]1962:103). During the early days of the conquest access to the *Gobernación de Popayán* from the Atlantic was possible using the Magdalena River and crossing the central cordillera in the Quindío pass, or the more convenient Guanacas passage, but it was not until the 1620s that this latter route was well opened and improved by property owners in Popayán (Marzahl, 1978:7, Bryant 2006:93). The connection between Cali and Popayán, on the other hand, took advantage of the rolling country in the foothills of the valley probably to evade the floodable flat zones of the Cauca basin. After all, before the Salvajina dam, constructed in the second half of the twentieth century, large parts of the basin were swamplands. Later at the beginning of the twentieth century railroad engineers choose the same line establishing stations through Jamundí, Guachinte, Timba, San Francisco, Asanzú, and finally reaching Suárez. From there on, the train started its ascendance to Popayán following the Ovejas river till finding the plateau at a high of 1700 meters above the sea level.

² For a detail account and critical reflection on of the ethnicization process of blackness in Colombia see Restrepo 2013.

³ In his analysis of black and indigenous social movements in Latin America, Peter Wade has contended that the Colombian example indicates: “land does not emerge on its own as an issue, but is always mediated by questions of identity and culture” (Wade 2010:125). However such naturalization must be taken with precaution. As anthropological research has shown in the last decades, notions of “identity,” “culture,” and “territory” may take on a powerful salience in the experience of those who feel their livelihoods threatened or suffer the powerful forces of oppression unleashed by deterritorialization processes (Gupta and Fergusson 1992). Yet, in that process these notions that are otherwise fluid, contextual and relational often end up appearing to be essential or primordial.

⁴ As introduced in Chapter 3 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán’s political movement was a dissidence of the Liberal Party, which invigorated the cause of social rights of peasants to land and brought novel multi-class coalitions around issues of labor. For an historical account on Gaitanismo and left liberalism mobilization in Colombia see Green 2003.

⁵ While the CRIC soon adopted a union organizational structure that brought it closer to workers and peasant struggles, the Movement of Indigenous Authorities, then called Indigenous Governors in March, promoted a different mobilization strategy that proclaimed indigenous societies as ethnic groups in defense of territorial rights, thus hampering the possibility of interacting with other social movements.

⁶ For a short and study on the figure of female cane workers in Puerto Tejada see the undegrad thesis “Cortando caña como machos” Lasso 2015, Departamento de Sociología, Universidad del Valle.

⁷ ANUC returned in 2008 as an independent social organization. In Popayán there were efforts to recover “la casa campesina,” which was lost after the late 1970s struggles and efforts were also directed towards renegotiating the debt of small farmers that had been beneficiaries of the land allocation of the 1980s. In 2013 a departmental congress was held, and a year later some of its members occupied the *Institute of Rural Development* (INCODER) in Popayán demanding resources for the implementation of productive projects, housing and acquisition of lands. This time black and indigenous peasant organizations were not key actors. Against the process of ethnicization opened by the 1991 constitution, ANUC demanded also state recognition as a valid interlocutor and receptor of resources for rural inhabitants. For more details see Duarte 2015.

⁸ The systematic use of torture during this period has been widely denounced, in addition to the disappearances and murders that took place. See reports and publications by the *The Historical Memory Group* of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Reparation/ Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación y Reparación, a commission designed to investigate paramilitary violence, created in the spirit of a transitional justice approach. See Vera 2017.

⁹ For more details on the constitution of new neighborhoods in the town of Puerto Tejada due to these civic and popular movements see Mosquera 1991.

¹⁰ Before state decentralization appointed mayors and locally elected councils had little financial resources and practically no political autonomy. The central government and para-state agencies were responsible for

the provision of social and basic public services. In many respects this situation led to the civic protests and social unrest of the 1970s and 1980s. See Collins 1988.

¹¹ It should be noted here, as a sort of methodological reflection, that the narrative scheme and the presentation of events in sequential order, should not lead the reader to envision these as autonomous or reorganizable units. On the contrary, these units are part of a larger inevitable interrelated whole. Unfortunately, one must recognize the limits of a presentation that obscures the simultaneous and interrelated nature of the events it seeks to portray. Given these limitations, contingencies and details tend to disappear behind a process of re-accommodation that constructs a general plot and coherent narrative, where painful episodes, disagreements, motives and personal strategies inherent in the conflict give way to a suspiciously clear and appreciable narrative structure. Without the aim of justifying this study's shortcomings, this seemingly arbitrary narrative structure was openly discussed and negotiated at different work sessions with community groups, and it is therefore one among other possible ways of presenting the events. Within the organized and sequential nature of written texts, one loses the intricate web of agreements and memories inscribed in the oral tradition. Even if those details may be absent in this text, one hopes that the questions raised here will lead to a deeper examination and a reassessment of the importance of working with those kinds of material in a decisive way.

¹² This paramilitary organization, aimed to "protect" the economic and political privileges of regional elites, formed in 1996. It united different Self-Defence Groups created in Colombia since the 1980s: Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá –ACCU–; Autodefensas de los Llanos Orientales; Autodefensas de Ramón Isaza (Autodefensas del Magdalena Medio Antioqueño –ACMMA–); and Autodefensas de Puerto Boyacá (Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio –ACMM–). Two years later three new organizations joined the AUC: Autodefensas de Santander y Sur del Cesar –AUSAC–; Autodefensas del Casanare; and Autodefensas de Cundinamarca. Despite the Program for Economic Reintegration, created in 2002 during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe Velez, paramilitary groups have transmuted in emerging criminal gangs (BACRIM) and other paramilitary groups such as *Rastrojos*, *Aguilas Negras*, and *Los Paisas*, among others. The jailed paramilitary commander Ever Veloza, alias H.H., has recently claimed to be responsible for influencing the elections that brought the politician Juan Jose Chaux to power as governor of the Cauca department in 2003. As governor, Chaux regularly employed derogatory language to describe the region's social movements and its leaders.

¹³ Salvajina was first studied by regional elites as a possible hydroelectric site in 1945. A year later Ciro Molina Garcés, then Secretary of Agriculture of the Valley, contracted with a New York firm a study of the water resources of the Valley, which showed another possible dam in Calima, Anchicaya and Timba (see Larsen 1955).

¹⁴ For an anthropological perspective on the architectural history of the area see Gutierrez, Guillermo 2017 "La arquitectura doméstica de la comunidad negra del concejo comunitario de Mindala." Masters degree dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Cauca University

¹⁵ See for instance CVC 2004.

¹⁶ For more on these processes of erasure with particular attention to the Cultural Politics of Race and Nature see Moore, et.al 2003.

¹⁷ Besides the construction of Dams the flood control works design by the CVC in the 1960s included plans such as the Aguablanca project, which claimed to insure proper drainage of the lowlands between Cali and the Cauca River, protecting also the city against flooding. The project included the construction of levees and embankments from the Lili River in the south to the express highway to Palmira in the north.

¹⁸ For a general environmental history critique of river control and intensive large-scale irrigation See Worster's 1994 article "Thinking like a river."

¹⁹ I am in debt to Axel Rojas for insisting on this issue. Personal communication.

²⁰ For a detail account of the internal discussions around collective landholding in La Toma see Arias 2015 and Ararat et.al 2013.

²¹ Unión FENOSA was the major shareholder until December 2009. Subsequently, Gas Natural SDG S.A., acquired 100% of the shares of Unión Fenosa S.A., becoming in turn the real beneficiary of 63.82% of EPSA shares. Finally, on December 14, 2009 it became the property of Colener S.A.S., a company that belongs 100% to Colinversiones S.A. [name used by the company until April 15, 2002, which today is called Celsia]. Inversiones Argos S.A. also have a share in the profits of La Salvajina. Today Grupo Argos S.A. is the majority shareholder of Celsia] and Banca de Inversión Bancolombia S.A. Financial

Corporation. Source: <http://notiagen.wordpress.com/2012/04/02/la-salvaje-salvajina-el-despojo-y-el-oro-ensuarez>

²² Despite EPSA effort to prevent locals from defending their own interests, residents of Suárez and the *veredas* around La Toma struggled to include some of its members in the process invoking Law 70. For a detail account of this first project see Ortega, Soler and Cañellas 2006, and Bernasconi 2014

²³ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/full-episodes/the-war-we-are-living/>

²⁴ Articles 16 of the International Labor Organization on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention No.169, 1989), and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People have been invoked successfully not only in Colombia but also in other parts of the world including Africa and Oceania. Both establish self-determination and autonomy through territory as a basis of political participation. Nevertheless, it has also worked ironically in contradictory directions. Its optimistic celebration of diversity has reified a definition of “culture” that is pretty much that of a mosaic of bounded and discrete entities. Furthermore, in their static and microscopic characterization the exclusion of relational perspectives and structural factors has resulted in interventions that divided politically subordinate groups that previously presented a united front against powerful external interests. Today, including Colombia 20 countries have ratified the ILO Convention, For more on this convention see:

<http://www.ilo.org/indigenous/Conventions/no169/lang--en/index.htm>

²⁵ See Bernasconi 2014 *Afro-Descendant Resistance A Strategy of Territorial Self-Determination in Colombian Northern Cauca*, Master thesis Univesridad del Valle. And see also Arias Cuéllar 2015 *Conflicto minero y organizaciones étnicas: Cabildo Indígena Nasa de Cerro Tijeras y Consejo Comunitario Afrodescendiente de La Toma en resistencia* Monografía de grado Universidad del Valle. Departamento de Sociología, Cali.

²⁶ See *Informe n° 36/00 Caso 11.101 Masacre “Caloto” Colombia*, April 13, 2000

<http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/99span/de%20fondo/colombia11101.htm>

²⁷ For James Scott studying the state means attending to the techniques and knowledges that produce a standardizing “state optic.” The use of the grid, geometry, metrics, scale, and cadastral surveys are just a few of the many techniques that Scott identifies in *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Certainly maps can facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, places, and processes, but as a particular “technology of power” they can also work politically and influence our understanding of the world. They can render “nature” not only a legible object, but also a “passive” landscape separated from the social and political realms. In fact, in the making of modern nation-states cartographic and statistical techniques have played a crucial role in the imagining and managing of territories, frontiers and populations. Just as the “birth of the clinic” established an alliance “between words and things, enabling one to see and to say” (Foucault 1975:xii), the modern mapping techniques and centralize information normalized knowledge through mechanisms like forecast, statistical estimates and overall measures producing simultaneously material and symbolic objects that appeared as preexisting orders. Here is where the normative aspect of some scientific disciplines and their expert knowledge comes into play (e.g. cartography, demography, agronomy, forestry, urbanism, etc.). However, as he notes governments are not the only ones involved in this process, nor is it this a process shielded against agency. In any case, in this Latin-American context, the “high modernism” project described by Scott hardly applies.

²⁸ Following Trouillot (2003) I understand “state effects” not as the product of a singular intention or will, nor as something solely obtain through national institutions or governmental sites. Especially, in Latin American contexts one must take into account that the “high modernism” project described by James Scott (1998) hardly applies. Here as in other postcolonial contexts the “will to improve” is enacted within a heterogeneous assemblage of existing repertoires, practices, devices and types of authority.

²⁹ Since 1994, the total number of internally displaced people in Colombia has surpassed three million (UNHCR 2007; IDMC 2006). While the sheer magnitude of this phenomenon is noteworthy, it is particularly striking that a large number of Colombia’s forced displaced are Afrocolombians populations.

³⁰ The auto 005 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

³¹ Yet, according to a recent report from the *Agencia Nacional de Tierras* there is no land left to meet the expectations of all the groups that claim land in the north of Cauca (Semana, Octubre 29 2017).

³² Although there were efforts to promote black culture and history in the 1940s, as the *Club Negro* de Colombia founded by students in Bogotá among which Zapata Olivella had an important role, it was in the 1970s when several groups, organizations and journals began to speak publicly about the conditions and challenges of people of African descent in Colombia. Prominent Afro-Colombian intellectuals conformed groups such as the Centro de Estudios Afro-Colombianos, the Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas, the Fundación Palenque, the Centro para la Investigación y el Desarrollo de la Cultura Negra (1975), which published the journal *Presencia Negra*, and the Círculo de Estudios de la Problemática de las Comunidades Afrocolombianas–SOWETO (1976). This latter group would later be a key player for the development in the Pacific coastal region of the organization known as CIMARRON (1982), a movement framed in the defense Afro-Colombian Communities' Human Rights. For more details on these platforms and processes see Peter Wade, "The Cultural Politics of Blackness in Colombia," *American Ethnologist*, 22:2 (1995): 342-358; and Anthony Ratcliff, "Black Writers Of The World, Unite!" Negotiating Pan-African Politics of Cultural Struggle in Afro-Latin America," *The Black Scholar* 37, no. 4, (Winter 2008): 27-38; 28.

³³ The *Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas* [Colombian Foundation to Investigate Folklore], the *Centro de Estudios Afro-Colombianos* [Center of Afro-Colombian Studies], and the *Asociación Cultural de la Juventud Negra Peruana* [Cultural Association of Black Peruvian Youth] sponsored and organized the event. For a list of participants and other details about the congress see the selected correspondence in the Manuel Zapata Olivella collection organized recently by Vanderbilt University: <http://mzo.library.vanderbilt.edu/correspondence/index.php>

³⁴ The speech delivered by Zapata Olivella in the Congress was titled "Opresión y explotación del africano en la colonización de América Latina."

³⁵ Libia Grueso has been a prominent intellectual-activists in the Afro-Colombian movement, she was co-founder of the Process of Black Communities (PCN) and together with other social leaders, was involved in the campaign that led to the writing and approval of "Law 70," which granted legal recognition and territorial rights to Afro-Colombian populations.

³⁶ Movimiento Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Comunidades Afrocolombianas (the Afro-Colombian Communities' Human Rights National Movement).

Chapter 5. Underground Politics

¹ According to the projections of the 2005 census from The National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/poblacion/proyepobla06_20/ProyeccionMunicipios2005_2020.xls, Accessed July 19, 2017.

² The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Colombian government initiated in 2015 a two-phase investigation on the environmental impacts of unregulated alluvial gold exploitation in Colombia. Among the initial findings is worth mentioning a geographical correlation with coca cultivation. 38 percent of the area affected by unregulated alluvial gold exploitation coincides with the presence of illicit coca crops. The report states that in 2014, 78,939 hectares of land were affected by this kind of gold exploitation and identified it as a main driver of deforestation. For more details see the link to the report. https://www.unodc.org/documents/colombia/2016/junio/Explotacion_de_Oro_de_Aluvion.pdf.

³ See the 2010 coca survey carried out by the Integrated System for Monitoring Illicit Crops (SIMCI) project of UNODC (https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia-cocasurvey2010_es.pdf).

⁴ However, in 2017 when the value of gold plummeted, things went back to the starting point. The latest Colombian survey shows an increase of 52 per cent in coca cultivation area - from 96,000 hectares (ha) in 2015 to 146,000 ha in 2016, a rise researchers attributed to a complex interplay of evolving conditions the peace treaties and the increase in the prices of coca leaf, which in 2016 were 43 per cent higher than prices in 2013, when coca cultivation began to increase. See the 2017 coca survey carried out by SIMCI project of UNODC https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/CENSO_2017_WEB_baja.pdf

⁵ The meeting was held in Santander de Quilichao on April 29, 2014. Among the organizers was the Association of Community Councils of the Northern Cauca ACONC, the association of indigenous cabildos of the Northern Cauca ACIN, and UAFROC that is a Unit of Afrocaucan Organizations also.

⁶ James Scott, has referred to this “state optic” as a violent project of legibility and simplification from where the state operates with its aerial photographs, metrics and censuses, and has insisted on the violence that these images usually bring with them (Scott 1998).

⁷ Source <http://goldprice.org/gold-price-history.html> Accessed June 2017.

⁸ The mechanics of acquisition of mining rights according to the Mining Code valid in Colombia (2018) has three stages: exploration, construction, and installation and exploitation. Exploration requires a mining concession granted by the Mining Authority (ANM), which comes with the registration in the National Mining Registry and the compliance with environmental exploration guidelines regarding activities such as drilling, water consumption and discharge permits. In addition, there are three main considerations with respect on the type of land: (a) privately owned land; (b) ethnic-owned land; and (c) publicly owned land. In the first case, the applicant requires an agreement with the landowner through direct private negotiations or through administrative/judicial proceedings. Regarding ethnic territories, in addition to establishment of easements, prior consultation is required with the correspondent communities. In the last case, municipalities and district authorities and the Mining Authority should coordinate their administrative competences and required easements. Once exploration is finished, the mining company should prepare a Works and Installations Program and an Environmental Assessment Study, in order to obtain exploitation authorizations from the Mining and Environmental authorities.

⁹ According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), 40 percent of Colombia’s territory was in 2012 licensed to or under review for mining concessions. Other reports placed that number higher, at nearly 60 percent (ABColumbia Coalition). <https://www.wola.org/analysis/illegal-mining-and-paramilitary-violence-in-afro-colombian-territories/> Accessed February 28 of 2017
<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/giving-it-away-colombia-mining-report.pdf> Accessed February 28 of 2017

¹⁰ The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund promoted since the 1990s the promulgation of new mining codes throughout Latin America: Argentina (1995), Bolivia (1997), Brazil (1996), Ecuador (1991), Nicaragua (1998), Peru (Law general mining 1992), and Venezuela (1999). Parallel to these codes Latin America has witnessed a boom in unregulated mining since 2010s, and a rise of complementary illicit activities, as organized crime and armed groups also recognized the potential of such business.

¹¹ For an overall policy analysis of USAID led alternative development interventions in Colombia see Vargas Meza 2010.

¹² For more details of this initiative see the world intellectual property organization (WIPO) web page. <http://www.wipo.int/ipadvantage/en/details.jsp?id=3509>

¹³ When I was finishing my fieldwork I learned that a resolution (058 of July 2016) of the Colombian Tax and Customs Organization (DIAN) subjected the organization to the same rules as multinationals, requiring them that, before the ore leaves the country, they must have a certification of the purity and weight, in order to calculate the royalties as accurately as possible. This procedure demanded a specialized laboratory, tripling export costs for the organization.

¹⁴ For a detail study of the Moral Control of Female Sexuality in mining sites see Cohen 2014.

¹⁵ See <http://mujeresnegrascaminan.com/comunicado-1/> and <https://afrocolombian.org/2014/11/25/peace-without-ancestral-afrodescendant-territories-not-for-the-black-women-of-northern-cauca/> accessed 07/04/2017

¹⁶ In colonial times runaway slave groups that were successful in creating small settlements of resistance were called *palenques* (see Jaramillo Uribe 1963, Arrázola 1970, Friedemann 1987, Escalante 1981, Taussig 1980). This term, like the word *quilombos* in Brazil, or maroons in the Caribbean, referred to fortified settlements in the woods where anyone who became a resident was considered a free man (See Kent 1996, Mintz 1989, Price 1979). Among the *palenques* that existed in colonial times in Colombia, the town of San Basilio has gained special renown becoming lately a symbol of the immaterial heritage of humanity recognized by the UNESCO (see Restrepo and Pérez 2005).

¹⁷ Following the first National Congress of the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero People, held between August 23 and 27, 2013, in Quibdó, Chocó, to commemorate the 20 years of the enactment of Law 70, black community councils in northern Cauca have held numerous workshops to train their guards and have begun to elaborate their distinctive elements. Today the guard has about 240 active members, and

each community council, as a minimum, must have a person devoted to this functions allowed by the Law as part of the forms of self-government. These guards don't use any guns, but as with the Indigenous Guard, with whom they have also shared experiences on defense of the territory, they carry wooden sticks, and in some symbolic occasions dull *machetes* adorned with the colors of the South African flag indexing their African heritage. In some municipalities the *guardia cimarrona* has taken elements of the *esgrima* or *grima*, a martial art utilizing sticks, knives, lances, and particularly the *machetes* used since early twentieth century, by the Afro-Colombian communities of the Gran Cauca and Tolima as part of their participation in the nation's popular conflicts.

¹⁸ It is significant that some of the scholars that organized the seminar (e.g. Colombian sociologist Fernando Urrea) were closely involved in the consultations around defining a new ethnic question for the 2005 Colombian census. At that time discussions grappled with the term "comunidad negra," which analysts saw as limited and meaningful mainly to the Pacific coastal region. The idea was to develop more inclusive categories to defining blackness that included not only cultural features, but also physical appearance and self-identification. The ethnoracial questions and response categories from the National Census applied in 2005 read s as follows: According to your culture, pueblo or physical features, are you or are you recognised as being: 1. Indigenous? (To which pueblo indígena do you belong?) 2. Rom? 3. a raizal? [a neologism meaning a rooted person, a native] of San Andrés and Providencia [Colombian islands in the Caribbean] 4. a palenquero of San Basilio? [someone from the village of San Basilio, an old palenque, or runaway slave settlement of colonial origin]. For more on this discussion see Telles, et.al 2015.

¹⁹ The complete list of demands included also the followings points: a)The immediate confiscation, exit, and destruction of backhoes that exploit gold in our territories without our consent in the municipalities of Guachené, Santander de Quilichao, Buenos Aires, and Suarez in the department of Cauca; b)Disciplinary investigation and sanctions against the officials that through action or omission permitted the entrance of excavators, which generate and/or aggravate the level of threat and vulnerability for women; c)Evaluation and integral reparations for the environmental damages to our food sovereignty and economy, which were caused by illegal mining in our territories; d) Recognition and protection of ancestral mining in Afrodescendant communities; e) Guarantees for our physical and cultural integrity and the protection of the collective rights of the women, men, youth, girls, and boys in the ancestral territories; f) Guarantee the protection of the lives of the leaders. Investigate the murders, the death threats, and the violent actions against the leaders, and bring the perpetrators to justice; g) Comply with the implementation of Constitutional Court Order 005 of 2009, Order 092 of 2008, and Sentence T-1045A, as well as codify Chapter 5 of Law 70 of 1993, in order to guarantee (1) the prevention of the uprooting and forced displacement of our communities, (2) the evaluation of the impacts and damages caused, and (3) the integral reparation for the communities in the context of collective rights; h) Direct communication between the Afrodescendant women of Northern Cauca with the negotiations in Havana because peace without free territories is not Peace; i) Apply the right to free, prior, and informed consultation and consent before making any decision that could have a positive or negative impact on our lives and territories; j) Revoke mining titles that were granted in violation of our collective rights and abstain from continuing to sell our territory to multinationals. See <https://afrocolombian.org/2014/11/25/peace-without-ancestral-afrodescendant-territories-not-for-the-black-women-of-northern-cauca/>

²⁰ See web page <https://afrocolombian.org/2015/05/04/afro-colombian-solidarity-campaign/>

²¹ See web page <http://www.blackwomensmarch.org/news/fundraiser-support-the-black-womens-mobilizations-1st-afro-diasporic-gathering>

²² The mining Code of 2001 previewed the formalization of 'traditional miners' by establishing an Article named Special Reserves (Article 31), and recognized the possible allocation of Mining Zones to ethnic communities as well as the rights to prior consultation (Articles 121-136).

²³ Geographic and anthropologic studies of environmental racism focus on how certain populations are able to secure safer and cleaner environments by moving away from industrial zones via suburbanization or gentrification, while others usually racialized are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and deprived areas (Pulido 2000, Ojeda 2011). In the northern Cauca context, scholars have also argued that giving the existent practices of dispossession and long marginalization in the area, "the geopolitical dimension of environmental racism helps one comprehend the economic geography of territories in which land use, industrial development, and urbanisation patterns promote differentiated and discriminatory

formations of society based on ethnicised and racialised practices of water and land grabbing” (Vélez 2012:434-35).

²⁴ For descriptions and analysis of these music and dances and its relationships with the celebration of the *Adoration de Nino Dios* or the adoration of the Christ-Child celebration see among others Aristizabal 2007, Lora 2017, Valderrama 2010.

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