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Claiming Lands from the City: Forced Displacement and Reconstruction in Contemporary  
Colombia

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## **Introduction:**

### **Contemporary Colombian Social Disarticulations**

Since 1996, thousands of people have died and hundreds of thousands more per year have been forced to flee their places of residence in an unprecedented wave of violent disputes that involve civil and military groups in contemporary Colombia. I propose to call this dispute a war over land-based resources. I argue that forced displacement is not only a violent eviction. It is part of a recent geo-politics of war and also a whole array of cultural and social practices involved in people's process of mourning and reconstruction. These *desplazados* are the forcibly displaced people who now occupy the peripheries of Colombia's small and large cities such as Bogotá.

This approach conceives of forced displacement as a fertile ground for research not only on political violence, war and pain, but also on the politics of reconstruction. By looking at how people interpret and talk about their evictions and the ways war has affected their life trajectories, I propose to address forced displacement not only as an imposed and disrupting mobility among individuals but also as a process that has articulated municipal, urban and global anti-war movements. Forced displacement in Colombia is situated at the confluence of national and global processes and exposes some features that seem to characterize the movement and resettlement of populations worldwide at the beginning of the twentieth-first century.

From a national perspective, I argue that the violent conflicts that are claiming lives and provoking massive movements of population in the last years are associated with disjointed representations of the Colombian territory and conceptions of nationhood. Official

notions of the nation-state contrast with transnational privatization of resources, the exploitation of mini-territories by armed groups, the use of land-corridors for illegal drug and arm-trafficking, and the defense of collective and inalienable lands undertaken by ethnic groups.

Moreover, I assert that Colombian war is a situation of competing sovereignties in which different forms of administration, use and control of territories, and discrepant interpretations of history, inclusion and social justice converge. The priority of the last administration of President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2006) has been to recover security and the Colombian state's monopoly of violence through strong and well-motivated armed forces. Paramilitary groups have presented themselves as redemptory warriors protecting decent Colombians against insurgency and promoting a remodeling of land-tenure and the introduction of intensive agro-business activities. In contrast, old guerrilla groups have presented themselves as the armies of the *pueblo* and established their own fiefdoms for militaristic purposes and economic sources of income. And finally, squatters, indigenous and Afro-Colombian civilians have engaged in the defense of their territories, especially those from which they have been evicted, arguing that they entail cultural rights and ancestral land-management practices.

From a global perspective, these conflicts over lands are associated with three sorts of processes. First, the war against drugs that, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, became part of the US war against terrorism with the implementation of Plan Colombia, an assistance package signed on July 23, 2000 to eradicate narcotics production. Second, the free-trade economic treaty signed in 2005 between the Colombian and the US government that marks the official incorporation of Colombian economy into the global economy. People I interviewed

associate this new era of neo-liberalism with the emptying of strategic areas in the Colombian countryside to enable the extraction of timber, oil and multinational agro-industrial activities. Third, the global networks of humanitarian aid and human rights that are defining the international standards of assistance and imposing a new “civilizing” model of development on poor and “war-torn countries.”

A central argument of this dissertation is that forced displacement cannot be analyzed only in terms of processes of expulsion. In fact, the main focus of the analysis is the way in which displaced populations resettle in the city of Bogotá. As they cope with pain, loss and grief, displaced people also reinvent their lives and identities and create for themselves new forms of subjectivity and agency. These new forms clearly reveal the neo-liberal conditions under which poor people find ways of inserting themselves in contemporary urban environments, and these are markedly different from the Fordist and developmentalist contexts in which previous generations of migrants have found their place in large cities throughout Latin America from the mid-twentieth century on. Entrepreneurial informal activities, ethnic economic enclaves and a vibrant network of human rights organizations and NGOs are some of the social and political spaces that internally displaced populations have opened and consolidated in their process of reconstruction.

This dissertation focuses on a very recent wave of forced migration in Colombia –not the first one in the country’s history marked by successive episodes of political violence and forced migrations. During the period known as *La Violencia* (1950s and 1960s), 40,000 plots of land were deserted and 2 million Colombians abandoned their land and reshaped Colombian demography. Government and media saw displaced and expelled populations as

economic migrants coming from the countryside and forming part of spontaneous processes of urbanization of the middle-sized and big Colombian cities.

After 1995, when war spread out and intensified, forced migrants fell under the category of “evacuees” as if they were affected by a natural disaster called “violence.” These populations were finally recognized as “internally displaced populations” in 1995 and in 1997 they were entitled to Law 387, 1997. Despite this law, only humanitarian assistance has been provided and the Constitutional Court has issued various sentences to enforce it, as I will explain in chapter 2.

There are three sources of statistics of internal displacement that never coincide and none of them produce reliable figures. Statistics have become an instrument of power. The state with the RSS, based on his unified registration system SUR<sup>1</sup>, has its own statistics and reports every six months and claims that the accumulated number of displaced people is 1,732,551 (SUR 2006); CODHES has its own system call SISDES<sup>2</sup> and also has an accumulated number of nearly 3 million displaced people since 1985; the Church using a more rigorous statistic methods releases every six months a bulletin from their own mobility center of research and does not keep a record of accumulated number of displaced people like the former sources of information do.

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<sup>1</sup> Sistema Único de Registro, Unified Registration System of Social Solidarity Network.

<sup>2</sup> Sistema de Información sobre Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento Forzado. Information System on Human Rights and Displacement in Colombia.



Number of displaced people per year in Colombia (1999-2004)

Years	CODHES	RSS
1999	288.000	25.216
2000	317.375	266.605
2001	341.925	322.104
2002	412.553	365.961
2003	207.607	219.971
2004	287.681	159.956

Sources:

Social Solidarity Network (RSS 2005)

[www.red.gov.co/Programas/Apoyo\\_Integral\\_Desplazados/Registro\\_SUR/Registro\\_SUR\\_Octu\\_31\\_2005/Registro\\_SUR\\_Nov\\_04\\_web\\_Acumualdo.htm](http://www.red.gov.co/Programas/Apoyo_Integral_Desplazados/Registro_SUR/Registro_SUR_Octu_31_2005/Registro_SUR_Nov_04_web_Acumualdo.htm)

Consulting Center for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES 2005) [www.codhes.org/cifra/grafico/tendencias1985\\_2005.jpg](http://www.codhes.org/cifra/grafico/tendencias1985_2005.jpg)

Unlike the mass displacements taking place in Africa, Colombia's internally displaced people flee individually or in small groups of persons, settle in shanty towns around major cities or drift for months around the countryside. Bogotá is the first place of reception in terms of number of displaced people. It received approximately 19% of the total displaced population in 1997, 15% in 1998 (Pérez 2004) and 9% in 2000 (Meertens 2002). When displaced people reach the city, they have been previously in small and middle-sized towns located near their home-towns. There they stay with family contacts or friends who shelter them temporarily and then they leave again to avoid further persecutions in these towns. So they move to the big cities to find anonymity as well as to look for jobs. In Bogotá, they stay mainly in rooms that they rent or *inquilinos* which are rooms in a building or a house on the peripheries of Bogotá with various floors that have been subdivided for the purpose of renting.

Unlike the mass displacements or "exodus," Bogotá is the final destination for individuals and families who move in steps and in a dispersed manner (Meertens 2002). In

Bogotá, they continue to move constantly mainly because most of them cannot pay their rent regularly and so they go from one room to another in what is known “inter-urban displacement.” Displaced populations resettle mainly in the poorest areas of the southern and western districts of the city of Bogotá: Ciudad Bolívar (26%), Kennedy (11%), Bosa (10%), and Usme (8%). Adjacent to the southern part of Bogotá, the municipality of Soacha, has the highest rate of displaced people arrivals in the entire country (Pérez 2004:29). Between 1993 and 2005 displaced populations have settled in 50 new small districts they have been helping to form and consolidate (Pérez 2004) (Figure 1).

By focusing on how various groups of internally displaced households resettled in Bogotá, their interpretations of war, and their process of being removed from their homes and lands, I report on a historical violent reality interpreted as a spatial and a temporal discomfort but also as an imposed redistribution of wealth and labor. By “displacement,” I refer to a forced removal from people’s homes and lands, a turning point in people’s life-trajectories but also a restructuring of their lives. Mainly the young, men and women activists, community leaders, tenant farmers, and small agricultural entrepreneurs escape from places controlled by armed groups. My interviewees explain how in some cases armed groups inculcate fear by abducting young boys and girls when they besiege a town or a village. “Rumor somatized” is Allen Feldman’s concept (1995) that I use in this work to convey the increasing atmosphere of anxiety and distrust that make people abandon their work, land and possessions.

By creating a temporal space of before, the internally displaced create an elaborate discourse to carry out a politics of place. Through the works of memory they claim rights over an imagined land of before in which they have invested dreams, community efforts and

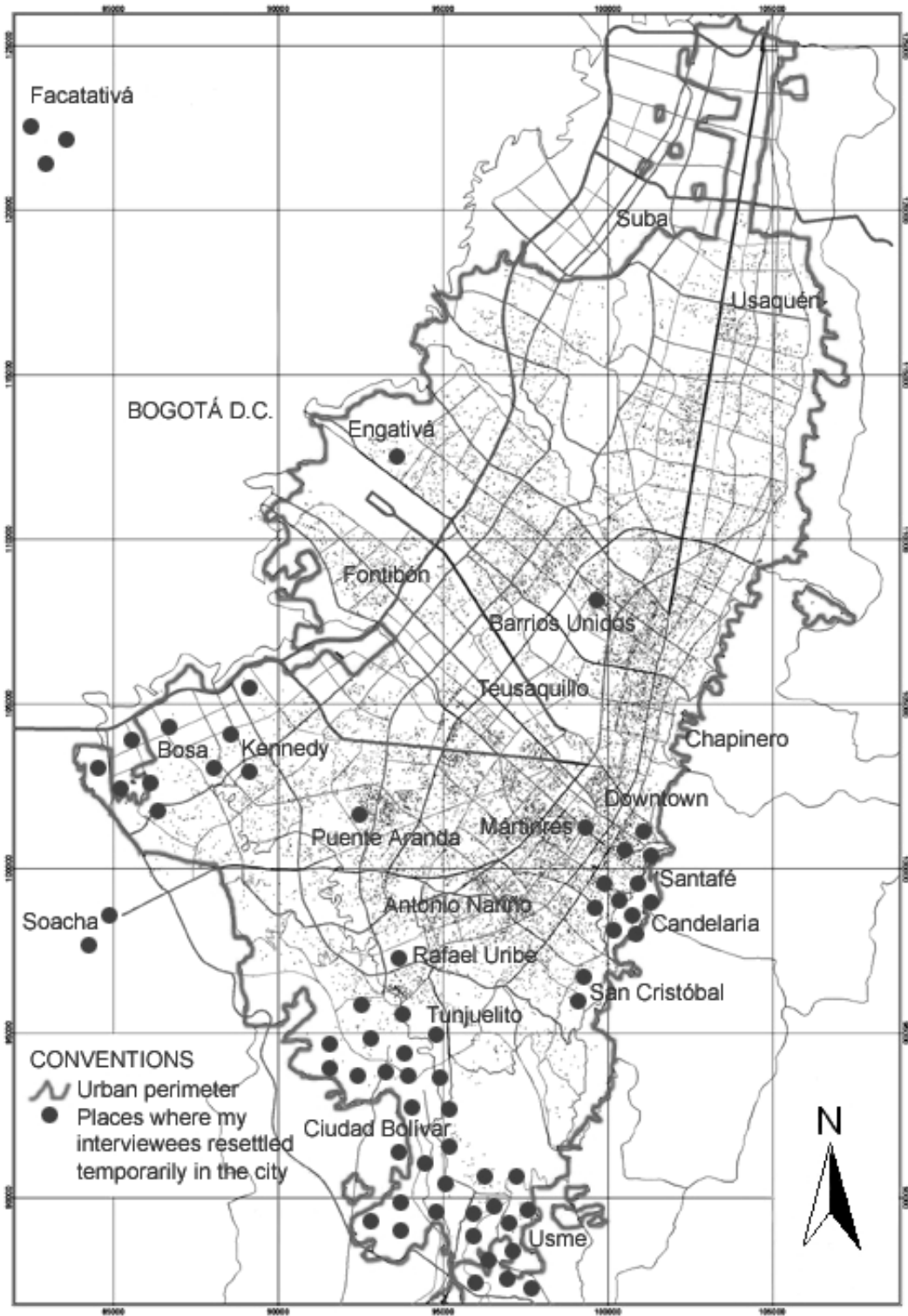


Figure 1: Location of Interviewees in Bogotá

political struggles. They denounce imperial neo-liberal interests concerning mineral and petroleum resources as well as development plans and the use of forced displacement as a technique to expropriate them from a former happiness and wealth.

This analysis is based on a combination of methods and types of data. To understand the Colombia's current political context, including Alvaro Uribe peace process with paramilitaries, the Free Trade Agreement signed with the US, and the US sponsored Plan Colombia, I review these processes' official documents as well as the reports of local news between 2004 and 2005. To build an account of the current version of violence that I call "war" and the main arguments used by armed groups involved in it, I use these armed organizations' web pages as well as a historical analysis of the recently-produced scholar work on violence in Colombia. To explore how fear is lived in the rural municipalities and to obtain people's accounts of displacement, I relied on open-ended interviews conducted in the House of Migrants in Bogotá with people coming from various areas of conflict. To have access to collective discourses on displacement from social organizations and movements, I organized workshops with leaders affiliated with the ONIC<sup>3</sup> and AFRODES<sup>4</sup>. I got to know their history and struggles over land amidst assassinations and persecutions and their plans to oppose recent neo-liberal plans implemented to expropriate their territories from them.

Given the constant intra-urban mobility of the groups of people I could contact, I did not adopt a participant observation approach in the strict sense of the term. Instead, I focused my analysis on people's discursive practices by interviewing them at different times and scenarios and building case studies that I followed over two years of fieldwork. By selecting different ethnic displaced poor populations, I wanted to shake assumptions that have

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<sup>3</sup> Organización Nacional indígena, National Indigenous Organization

<sup>4</sup> Asociación de afro-colombianos desplazados, Organization of Afro-Colombian internally-displaced people

naturalized three ethnic groups as essentially different groups in Latin America. By demonstrating that ethnicity is built upon discourses that stress cultural distinctiveness amidst relations of power, I show that these groups are not so different from each other, and yet they have to present their claims under different cultural programs to have resonance with widespread discourses on culture and environment and to pursue their defense of “ancestral” territories. I also focus on these groups because they have alternative discourses from mainstream and middle-class Colombian opinions regarding armed conflict and the alleged benefits of neo-liberal model.

Ethnic organizations (ONIC, AFRODES) have addressed forced displacement by invoking memories of cultural and spiritual attachment to their territories to stake claims to land rights. Indigenous people affirm that they are spiritually connected to their territories and culturally ecological defenders of nature. Land for them involves a spiritual tie with Mother Earth, the main provider of life and food. They are aware that the land they have obtained and struggled for over many decades constitutes an enormous political power invigorated by new constitutional rights that make them owners of some of the most resource-rich lands in Colombia.

Afro-Colombians have very recently adopted a similar position asserting that their goal is to enforce and defend Law 70 of 1993 which entitles them to collective lands, places where they say they have been practicing a distinctive culture respectful of nature and based on alternative concepts of development and peace.

Often defined only as evacuees, victims of human rights violations, anomalous subjects, uprooted people, I argue that internally displaced people are subjects with the

capabilities to overcome the wounds of war and maintain ties with their places of previous residence as well as create new labor and social ties in the city.

By highlighting the blurred boundaries and transmutations between forced mobility and voluntary migration I discover that the internally-displaced people not only follow the routes and avenues of former migrants from their communities but also create new economic and political spaces using ecological, ethnic and pluri-cultural discourses.

Hundreds of thousands of people that resettle in the city of Bogotá every year encounter new highly-trained humanitarian personnel from international agencies and hundreds of NGOs ready to make them entrepreneurial and modern. Coping constantly in their new environments with scarcity and marginality, displaced people find an informal web of networks linking municipalities, provinces and cities. Internally displaced leaders connect with a wide array of NGOs, organizations and new political movements to open up new informal labor circuits. Cultural practices, knowledge, and services presented in the city as “ancestral” and “authentic” promote new markets and movements consumed by new publics interested in alternative ways of thinking.

Although this research is not about the city of Bogotá, I would like to provide the reader with a description of the contrasts of the context in which I carried out my fieldwork and the contradictions of the city where most of my informants and interviewees planned to remake their lives. Through some vignettes drawn from the social life of Bogotá, I would like to illustrate how multiple spatialities coexist within the city and how different the experience of place can be for social actors subjected to different matrixes of power relations (Moore 2005). Bogotá can be an island, a safe-haven from war when you navigate through its most safe and prosperous social networks. However, it is a city where you can also discover the

main threads of war when subtle ethnographic connections with terror remind you of the growing social inequality and poverty that contrast with the wealth and prosperity of sectors favored since the 1990s neo-liberal reforms.

### **Bogotá: Disconnected Cities**

After four years of intense training in graduate school in the vastness of Los Angeles' suburbs, I was still shocked by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and eager to conduct fieldwork in the city where I grew up and worked during most of my life. In contrast to many other South American metropolises (São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Lima) Bogotá is a city that has remained hard to reach, a place largely sealed-off from the rest of the world for more than four centuries, located in a huge, high-Andean plateau against a wall of somber green hills that forms its natural eastern border.

Bogotá is a city that has been shaped and reshaped by successive waves of forced migration. During the 1950s and 1960s, the city grew three times: thousands of internally displaced people that had fled from the bipartisan violence taking place in the countryside as well as labor migrants poured into the city. Since the 1970s, rural migrants have resettled in the southern and western parts expanding many times the peripheries of a city that today reaches 7 million inhabitants. Since then, hundreds of illegal neighborhoods have proliferated through the invasion of plots of lands later legalized under the pressure of neighborhood organizations applied to the municipal administration. Like many other cities in the world, Bogotá is a polycentric and segregated one with legal and illegal economic sectors, a city reorganized around the obsessive global concern of security.

Ciudad Bolívar is the name of the southern periphery that harbors more than 400.000 people. Its commercial areas connected by paved roads contrast with the unpaved and disorganized little trails that go up and down through the eroded hills. When it rains these residential streets are transformed into mudslides, and during the few dry seasons they becomes dusty pathways. As I went up towards the most dangerous districts with shining names such as *Tesoro* (Treasure), *Estrella* (Star), and *Diamante* (Diamond), I noticed the presence of tiny barky dogs and roosters tied by their legs and eating whatever they could find in the green pastures that still grow here and there.

You can clearly identify the migrants that arrived during the fifties and sixties in this part of the city because their houses occupy the best spots to build, and they use a rural style with a patio to raise their animals, dry their clothes and stock the materials used to renovate their houses. Migrants who arrived ten years ago have houses already of concrete and bricks with two or three floors, telecommunication equipment, and electronic appliances. Recently arrived migrants have improvised wooden houses with tin tiles, stones and sticks. Their huts are usually located in inadequate areas and are connected to a TV antenna, an electric pole and a source of water. The constant selling and reselling of plots in the illegal market of lands on the peripheries of Bogotá grows parallel to the dynamic and diverse small and informal entrepreneurial activities run by old residents and newly arrived families in their neighborhoods of residence.

As I went down, I entered a more consolidated urban sector. There I found a big sport complex built by the city hall administration of Enrique Peñalosa called Center Salesiano with soccer, basketball and tennis courts, conference rooms, and auditoriums. A few days before, president Uribe held a meeting in these auditoriums and a ceremony confirming the



reinsertion of the paramilitaries that he plans to relocate in Ciudad Bolívar. In the same block we saw another building with the name of Colsanitas International, one of the new health corporations that replaced the only public health center of the sector.

Armed conflict has taken place right here in Ciudad Bolívar. “Mom, do not let your son get twisted,” said one the fliers distributed by a Christian church in which they used the adjective “twisted” to mean “joining” the guerrilla militias operating in Ciudad Bolívar. In fact I was walking through the streets where five years ago rumors said that guerrilla groups carefully hid and locked kidnapped people in subterranean rooms they brought directly from their strongholds in the Southern Amazon plains. This area was then taken over by paramilitary militias who kept an eye on every person and were responsible for a list of hundreds of disappeared young boys. Ironically, the internally-displaced people resettled where armed groups also organized and had their units of urban operations.

In contrast, there is also a parallel city of the middle and upper classes where you can see and live all the changes that neo-liberalism has brought to the city: malls, multinational corporations, fancy restaurants, financial headquarters, spas, and also international humanitarian agencies offices unfolding in new elegant international complexes. Bogotá became a new center of capital accumulation connected to a wider global network as part of the economic restructuring initiated in the early 1990s. Simultaneously, upscale neighborhoods, privatized streets, closed entrances, and new exclusive, safe and secluded residential worlds or “fortified enclaves” (Caldeira 2000) appeared. All the neighborhoods of the eastern and northern parts of the city saw walls, bars, electronic integrated security systems proliferate when their residents realized that armed conflict was next door and the

fear of crime, terrorism, and kidnappings were threats that made necessary private security, armored cars and body-guards.

In general, I found Bogotá less chaotic than in the mid 1990s with its new system of transportation called Transmilenio, an impressive system of recently built public libraries, beautiful public facilities and parks in rich and poor districts, a vibrant site for theater, fashion and cinema. Based on the external improvement of this new global city, you would hardly know that there was an intense and bloody armed-conflict in almost every corner of this country.

From a city with one of the highest rates of crime in the world in 1992, it is now a city with more manageable levels of street violence. From a city that Colombians used to describe as dirty, hectic, cold and dangerous during the 1980s and early 1990s, it has become a civic example after ten years of well-run city administrations that were able to defeat corruption and administer public finances efficiently. Along with these successful programs on security and management transparency, the city hall had also run projects on citizenship education, renovation and embellishment of public spaces located in central areas of the city.

Pierre was transferred from Dublin to Bogotá as the director of the security office of a big transnational oil company in South America. Pierre and his wife Céline lived in a 500 m<sup>2</sup> eighth floor in the most elegant residential complex of Los Rosales next to the eastern hills of Bogotá. Walls in brick and a beautiful and bright wooden floor formed a giant living room of their apartment with a fire pit and 180° view of the north of the city. Pierre was in charge of monitoring the transportation of oil through the roads that cross guerrilla dominated areas in the Provinces of Casanare and Arauca. In Bogotá, they had a maid, a cook, a driver, and a nanny for their two children. His wife, Céline, was in love with Bogotá. Every weekend they

went to a beautiful resort located in the hot lands just half an hour from Bogotá. Céline told me that she felt the need to be more engaged with the city because she found it completely split into poor and rich realities. The main topic of my conversation that day of my visit in February 2003 was of course the bomb that the FARC<sup>5</sup> guerrilla group had just exploded two days before in El Nogal, one of the social clubs located three blocks away from Pierre and Céline' apartment. Céline was very troubled when she described to me that she heard and saw the explosion of the bomb that killed 36 and injured 160 people from the main window of her apartment.

Bogotá is a city that has undergone significant transformations including a new efficient style of governing, more manageable levels of crime, as well as an increasing economic role as the headquarter site for corporate investment. These changes have created a new glamorous image of a city that offers the best services in terms of arts, information and financial services for the new international corporate elites. Bogotá is a nodal point connected to the transnational extraction of resources but disconnected from the violence that accompanies these new booms of wealth. The city's economic dynamism in some areas is disarticulated from the lack of protection and opportunities of an increasingly unskilled and unemployed population of migrants who arrives everyday to Bogotá with the expectations of jobs and upward social mobility. This image of Bogotá as a successful experiment as a new global city has obscured the impact of outbursts of terror related to Colombia's wider political violence that have also taken place in the city throughout the last decade: assassinations of unionists, human right activists, journalists, and professors. Furthermore, the bomb attributed to the FARC guerrilla groups that exploded on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003 is part

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<sup>5</sup> Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-Popular Army

of those sporadic but recurrent events indicating that underneath the apparent prosperity of this city there is still an increasingly arbitrary and violent political and social conflict.

## **Fieldwork**

The House of Migrants of the Archdioceses of Bogotá run by Scalabrinian Brazilian nuns is located on the western part of the city surrounded by grey factories and industrial waste. A two-floor house made of bricks and blue windows and door frames stands alone amidst this industrial area thanks to the funds raised among the different parishes of Bogotá in 1995 by Cardinal Mario Rebollo Bravo to assist migrant populations arriving to the city. The house has a big kitchen, a dining room, a conference room, a chapel, three offices, a big underground garage, two comfortable and clean living rooms connected to bathrooms, showers and a little patio where people can wash their clothes.

Following the vocation of an Italian father named Scalabrini, called “the apostle of the migrants,” the House of Migrants’ activities are based on principles of catholic fraternity and charity as stated by Scalabrini himself:

“Migrations supersede ethnic spaces, bring cultures together and give birth to a new universal people. The world needs, more than ever, generous people willing to encounter migrants to host them, to share life with them and guide humanity’s pilgrimage. The poor is Christ’s image alive”.

During one of the required courses that the House of Migrants has to become a volunteer we learned that a “donor’s heart is transformed by helping others.” As in the case of World Vision Zimbabwe that Erica Bornstein discusses (2001) advancement and betterment of displaced populations through service is an integral aspect of their mission. The Colombian Church represented by Pastoral Social<sup>6</sup> has played an important role in the last

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<sup>6</sup> Social Pastoral of the Colombian Catholic Church.

ten years of recent armed conflict. Displaced people rely more on Catholic and Christian evangelical churches as well as on NGOs than on the Colombian state because it provides real help opportunely in terms of shelter, food and support during and after emergencies and massacres.<sup>7</sup>

Sister Janeth, the director, received me with the same kindness of two years before and told me that her team of nuns and volunteers were helping and sheltering more people than ever before. She also told me that a congressman was on the phone and told her he was going to send her more displaced people! She answered that it was the House of Migrants that was supposed to send people to be assisted by state offices. “That is the way the Colombian state deals with displaced populations!” she said ironically. But the house kept receiving funds and donations from volunteers that enabled them to offer displaced populations shelter, food, clothing, advocacy, school supplies bonuses, counseling and the possibility of pursuing the courses in haircutting, manicure, pedicure, and artcrafts offered by its own training center. She asked me if this time I was going to stay with them for good in the only house in the city that provides assistance to displaced populations.

I visited the House of Migrants twice a week over a period of six months and I used to sit with the people who were waiting in the patio to register with Jenny, the social worker, or Luz Angelica, the psychologist who conducted therapy with difficult cases of distress and mourning. Both of them helped me generously to familiarize myself with the house’s personnel and carry out unstructured and non-recorded interviews with internally displaced people that were either lodged or assisted by the center. I got to know as well laic volunteers from various prayer groups assisting people and filling out the sheets of enrollment.

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<sup>7</sup> The most exemplary cases of admirable long-term protection work with the community can be found in the Dioceses of Chocó.

During the first phase of my fieldwork, between August 2002 and July 2003, I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with men and women coming from rural towns located in the forest of the Pacific coast, the south-east Andean plains, the Middle Magdalena River area, and the central Andean region. During these encounters, I became knowledgeable about their war experience, sentiments of longing for their previous lives, as well as the role women have played as care-takers of their families as well as peace-keepers during and after fleeing. I explored the meanings that those former landscapes, lands, possessions, and social ties had for them, and the specific reasons of their flight. I also inquired about their process of reinsertion in the city, the institutions they have resorted to for assistance, places they have found to stay, practices they have employed to cope with scarcity, attempts to find a job, and perceptions of their neighborhood and the city.

Simultaneously, I also interviewed the directors of NGOs such as CEDAVIDA<sup>8</sup>, CINEP<sup>9</sup>, CODHES<sup>10</sup>, Taller de Vida<sup>11</sup>, Opción Vida<sup>12</sup>, and became acquainted with the strong ties displaced people have with a dense network of hundreds of these organizations to find jobs, to search for housing or to work as human rights defenders.

I contacted CODHES offices located in a tall building of the busy 19<sup>th</sup> street in downtown Bogotá. In 1992, a group of politically engaged academics, members of Social Pastoral, intellectuals and activists raised the issue of displacement for the first time in Colombia and created that center. Since then, they have been producing, systematizing and releasing information on the dynamics of war and the situation of forced displacement in

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<sup>8</sup> Fundación Social Colombiana CEDAVIDA, Colombian Social foundation CEDAVIDA

<sup>9</sup> Centro para la Educación e Investigación Popular, Center for Social Research and Education

<sup>10</sup> Consultaría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, Consulting Center on Human Rights and Displacement

<sup>11</sup> Workshop on Life

<sup>12</sup> Option of life

Colombia. They have created alliances with social and ethnic movements willing to denounce internationally the multiple violations of human rights that forced displacement entails and released a monthly bulletin with articles and statistical information about displaced populations at the national level. CODHES invited me to work with them and carry out inter-disciplinary research with some members of their staff to get to know better the situation in Bogotá of indigenous groups, Afro-Colombians, and people from Andean rural areas.

With CODHES' contacts I visited the AFRODES, PCN<sup>13</sup>, ADVICORA<sup>14</sup>, and ONIC to present the project that I intended to pursue. Many leaders questioned the project and argued that there were already thousands of studies with zero impact on internally-displaced people's lives. They affirmed that researchers and institutions were benefiting from their pain and difficulties, that they were tired of interviews and that this had to be a different sort of research. They were willing to participate only if there was a serious commitment from CODHES to work with them horizontally to have an impact on the government's public policies regarding internally displaced people and to share the benefits of the book that was going to be published with the information they provided. I was able to contact fifteen leaders, men and women, affiliates of these organizations who considered themselves as Afro-Colombian or indigenous and had been in the city no longer than two years.

In order to investigate these political cultural discourses as expressed by political leaders, I decided to organize two series of workshops that were recorded. By "workshop" I mean collective meetings during which there is a two-way exchange of information between researchers and participants. Unlike interviews, researchers gather information by

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<sup>13</sup> Proceso de Comunidades Negras, Black Community Process.

<sup>14</sup> Asociación departamental de la población desplazada por la violencia en Colombia en el Atlántico, Departmental Association of Violence-induced-displaced people from the Province of Atlántico

coordinating activities and dynamics that require the participation of the people. The first workshop had the following activities: a presentation of the participants stating their place of birth, their occupation before being displaced, their activities now, their place of previous residence, and the time they have been in Bogotá. In a second activity, participants were asked to share significant remembrances of their life trajectories as leaders. In a third activity, they were asked to comment on relevant aspects of their lives in their previous places of residence and relevant aspects of their lives in Bogotá. In a fourth activity, participants were asked to draw the spatial and social elements of their previous places of residence as well as their experiences and survival strategies in Bogotá.

The second workshop was divided in two activities: groups coming from the same place of previous residence were in charge of describing to the audience their family and social life that they considered part of their traditions. During the second activity, the members of different political organizations that people were representing were asked to discuss, write and present political and economic projects they had in mind to survive in the city of Bogotá.

Fifteen Afro-Colombian displaced men and women affiliated to AFRODES, PCN and ADVICORA coming from the northern area of the Pacific Coast called Riosucio, the southern area called Barbacoas, the Middle Magdalena region, and the south of the province of Atlántico, attended both workshops carried out between November 2002 and March 2003 in the offices lent to us by the organization of displaced women called Taller de Vida.

Fifteen male Indigenous leaders from five ethnic groups (Kankuamo, Pijao, Inga, Nasa and Uitoto) coming from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the Amazon Region, and the Southern Andean region attended the first workshop. This group of leaders asked me to



change the dynamics of the second workshop, and they proposed to focus the discussion on the following topics: history of their movements, history of violence in their regions, the causes of displacement, the actors of the war, and a proposal for public policy for indigenous displaced populations. I organized and scheduled these events in ONIC offices from June until August 2003.

Eventually, between May and July 2004 I was able to conduct four additional workshops with each ethnic group separately. In the first, I met women leaders of the community of Riosucio. During the second workshop, I got acquainted with women coming from the community of Barbacoas. On the third, I invited recently arrived Kankuamo men and women. On the fourth, I only worked with Pijao indigenous men and women. These events took place from April to August 2004 at the Educational Center of the House of Migrants.

The people I interviewed and met have a very heterogeneous history of mobility. I got to know Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders who had left their home-towns when they were teenagers, worked as state functionaries, studied in cities, were trained as political leaders in many municipalities, and returned to their home-towns after the 1991 Constitution to serve as traditional political leaders. Indigenous people returned to serve within their *resguardos* and Afro-Colombians in *consejos comunitarios*.

I met black families from relatively isolated rural areas of the Northern Province of Chocó, like the Salaquí River area, but also urban black families born in rural areas and labor migrants throughout the cities of the Pacific Coast like: Tumaco, Buenaventura and Cali. Similarly, I met indigenous people who had long-lasting and strong ties with the city of Bogotá, like the Pijao indigenous households, and also families from the Amazon basin that

were living in the capital of the country for the first time. Some groups, like the Ingas, traveled throughout the country permanently as part of their commercial activities; others, like the Kankuamos, moved only within a region around the province capital, Valledupar, due to ecological and cultural claims about the preservation of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as a global natural reserve. In the case of rural workers from Andean areas who had joined ethnic organizations of internally displaced people afterwards, they had been moving from one farm to another or from one town to another; they had been founders of villages, cultivators, important community leaders, employees in farms and the agro-business industry. Most of them have built, rebuilt and renovate their houses many times in their lives. They have taken care of farms and, simultaneously, were able to own their plots of lands and shops or *tiendas* to complement their incomes.

Most of the indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders I met had long histories of Marxist training at the national and at the regional levels and had participated in planning commissions, committees, teacher training programs, and development projects. Their interests in discussing politics rather than cultural-change issues comes from the fact that they are deeply concerned with the impact of global political and economic change on local communities where the Colombian state has been making concessions to international global resource extraction interests. Younger leaders have been studying in universities to master the official discourse about indigenous autonomy within a pluralist society.

While working with Colombian ethnic organizations I decided to use the methodology called action and participation research (Fals Borda 1994). I defined the topics of the workshops following people's motivations and interests in participation. Interaction and dialogue with the main leaders were key aspects to ensure their participation. Most of

the leaders wanted the workshop activities to be focused on their previous life, what they did, what they call their “traditions,” environment, memories, social and family life, food and political projects they had in mind to cope with their current situation. We also talked about their lives in the city: their perceptions of urban space, housing, social networks, food, political organization, and their relation with assistance institutions.

In a way the workshops ended up being a way of discussing belonging as a way of remembering. Participants emphasized the importance of discussing their notion of territory and the location of their social movements within their own version of the history of Colombian violence.

During the meetings, indigenous people wanted to reproduce the style of their meetings in which they control particular points of view that they consider too personal and convey a collective opinion and a unified group discourse. Throughout their political careers they have been trained in their organizations to give political speeches, so the workshops were punctuated with rhetoric and an ironic sense of humor. In contrast, I found some reluctance from the male leaders of Afro-Colombian organizations to participate in the workshops that were attended by a majority of women. The time spent with them was marked by teasing and relaxed interactions but also by people’s pauses that signaled they were not willing to retell and reopen their sad stories.

As an associate researcher of the Instituto PENSAR<sup>15</sup>, I was invited to join a team working on the topic of ethics and forced displacement. With them I carried out visits to the rooms displaced people were renting and the shops and stalls they had in various locations of the periphery of Bogotá: Ciudad Bolívar, Altos de Cazucá, Santafé, Engativá, and Usme (See

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<sup>15</sup> Center of Social and Cultural Studies at Universidad Javeriana

figure 1). These were rooms these families were renting or the houses they were able to purchase and improve with the financial support of their political organizations.

As part of my fieldwork I visited Quibdó and Neiva. Quibdó is located in the middle of the tropical jungle between the Andes and the Pacific Coast and receives most of the people evicted by paramilitary and military campaigns in the north of Chocó province. Neiva is located between the eastern chain of mountains and the eastern Amazonian plains. Neiva receives most of the displaced people evicted by guerrilla actions in the Amazon plains and by paramilitary actions in Cauca and Huila provinces. Many of these displaced people migrate later to Bogotá. In Quibdó I visited the diocese where I gathered archival information of its important work denouncing the violation of Human Rights. I visited three zones of resettlement La Gloria, Villa España, and the invasion called El Futuro. I conducted interviews with the functionaries of IMO<sup>16</sup> and UNHCR<sup>17</sup> in Quibdó. I visited The Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas<sup>18</sup>, ACIA<sup>19</sup> and the Organización Proceso del 96<sup>20</sup> where I met women and men leaders who escaped the bombing of the community of Riosucio in 1996 and organized around this event an anti-war movement. In Neiva I visited the Unidad de Atención a Población Desplazada<sup>21</sup> where I contacted three women that I visited and interviewed in their rooms located in two recently created resettlements areas called Falla Bernal and La Nueva Espera.

I followed up the trajectories of six displaced families linked to NGOs and ethnic political organizations. With this information I was able to understand people's moves and

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<sup>16</sup> International Migration Organization.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees.

<sup>18</sup> Network of Women of the Province of Chocó.

<sup>19</sup> Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato, Peasant Association of the Atrato River.

<sup>20</sup> 1996 Process Organization.

<sup>21</sup> Assistance Office for Displaced People.

efforts to improve their lives in the city. Over a period of five months I was able to do participant observation with Pijao indigenous displaced people organized around the Cabildo Ambiká and follow their claims for the recognition of their indigenous jurisdiction before the state and the City Hall in Bogotá. By following these families I was able to build the cases that I use to illustrate my arguments in chapters 4 and 5.

I did an extensive archival revision and analysis of the vast Colombian literature recently published on forced displacement using the material presented during The Public Seminar on Forced Displacement (Cátedra de Desplazamiento Forzoso) at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia the first semester of 2003. As a member of the REDIF<sup>22</sup>, I participated in one seminar of researchers that took place in Medellín December 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 as a preliminary event of the first public seminar called “Ciudades y desplazamiento forzado” held at the Universidad de San Buenaventura in Cartagena August 12-14<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

### **Blocking the Pain of Violence**

My first experience at the House for Migrants is still vivid in my mind. The young indigenous woman I interviewed had the courage to confess her rosary of tragedies: she was not only forced to abandon her land and few belongings but she also had AIDS. Her husband had died from it very recently. The day she knew the results of the medical exam she wanted to throw herself in front of a car. She told me that what attached her to life were her two children, who were not sick. After many interviews like this one, I found myself in the position of witnessing people's intimate suffering without being able to alleviate it in any way. The phantoms of the anthropologist as a Malinowskian hunter of information haunted

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<sup>22</sup> Red de investigadores en desplazamiento forzado en Colombia, Network of researches on forced displacement in Colombia.

me. I was in a comfortable position collecting data while they were in need of addressing their tragedies. I not only experienced impotence, but also felt an urgent need to offer something worthy, not just a pathetic piece of paper with the address or telephone number of a grass-root organization or an association to which they might resort.

It is not my intention here to examine the role that compassion might play in fieldwork practice. Rather, I want to reflect on how anthropology might contribute to a better understanding of pain and on the discrepancy between theoretical discussions and the realities we face in fieldwork. I also want to address how the ethnographer's own sense of being is affected while facing others' struggles to rebuild their lives.

Pierre Bourdieu and his research team's *La misère du monde* (1998) offered me some relief, in particular the chapter called "Comprendre," in which they assertively strive "to be in others' shoes in thought" in the process of interviewing and refer to a necessary empathy between researcher and interviewees sharing the difficulties of their existence. These encounters in fact imply an agreement of trust by which the social scientist shares people's difficulties and their experience occupying an inferior and obscure social position amidst a prestigious and privileged universe. For the interviewees, it may be an opportunity to be heard, and to build their own point of view about themselves and the world, to participate in what these authors call "the happiness of expression."

By telling part of their life stories, people shared with me clear and lucid accounts of what was going on in the war in Colombia. This issue concerned them as deeply as it concerned me as an ethnographer. Of course my experience of violence has not been direct. It has been that ambiguous and tormenting sense of having been there not as a victim but as an involved spectator, a spectator nevertheless. Since I was a child I have been witnessing the

violence from the outside, from a distancing “visual omniscience,” as if I was looking at destruction from a temporary shelter (as Feldman would put it) (1995:224).

As the stories I heard piled up in my mind, I noticed myself becoming increasingly bitter, especially when listening to irritating comments from the Bogotanian middle class about the *desplazados*. This word became part of everyone’s conversations in Colombia, part of a discourse about a list of problems added to our quotidian life. There was always uneasiness and doubt about whether people with placards asking for money and standing in front of the red lights of the city of Bogotá were “real” displaced people or whether they were lying. The way middle-class men and women talked about the suffering of others became unbearable in the context of what I had just learned about municipalities located not more than one hour and half by car from Bogotá. The word “displaced” in Colombia was everywhere: from the common talk among people to the government’s broadcasting on T.V. “Displacement cannot be invisible to our spirit, attitude, and commitment. We cannot get used to displacement, we have to see it and assume it as an issue of concern for all Colombians,” preached one of the institutional broadcasts of the RSS<sup>23</sup> in 2003. Although this message appealed for citizen engagement, the upper classes in Colombia refused to acknowledge that there was a bloody dispute over wealth and territories and that, as a result, some people had been forced to leave their homes and lands.

The way the middle and upper classes block the violent reality that surrounds them corresponds to the fact that in Colombia, authorized political accounts have always represented displacements, evictions, tortures and violence as a matter of “others” located on the periphery, in the ‘far away’ places of the country. Among middle and upper classes there was an assumption that the war had been taking place “elsewhere.” For instance, the current

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<sup>23</sup> RSS: Red de Solidaridad Social, Social Solidarity Network

government has promoted the idea that there is no armed conflict in Colombia but instead a terrorist threat. The Uribe government's appeal to the global threat of terrorism is an effort to recover citizen support for its program called "democratic security" and for the government's promise to combat *los violentos* once and for all.

This distance and the incapacity of upper and middle sectors of civil society to demand accountability for the atrocities committed during the last two decades is reinforced by a historically grounded attitude related to the hierarchical use of social walls to mark cultural and social differences. The 'other' is the one who is violent, wild, and unreliable. Collectivities are seen as threatening and *maliciosas* (wicked). The patron-client relationship has perpetuated colonial fantasies about the other who belongs to a different class that is racialized borrowing the old colonial caste distinctions and using the pejorative term of *indio*. This peculiar hierarchical understanding of alterity is closely related to the failure to acknowledge others' pain, an issue analyzed at length by Elaine Scarry (1987) and useful in understanding the social responses of those living in an interplay of denying and facing violence. After two centuries of civil wars and generalized violence, pain has not integrated those who have suffered into a single moral community (Das 1995:176, 178) to oppose war and human rights violations. For example, the discourse of the state of exception has been used by the Colombian state to justify the need to exterminate subversive groups; armed groups have used the discourse of the necessity of war to debunk an unequal social order and an ineffective state, to justify their claims for justice, and uncover a profitable economy of war. Moreover, the talk of violence present in thousand of books and articles written on violence in Colombia have made of the word "violence" a euphemism and impeded the acknowledgement of what is really going on in Colombia. Furthermore, the pain produced by



the political killings and abductions occurring in Colombia every year has never been given a public hearing or a tribunal of justice, and silences have never been addressed, thus making society a historical accomplice.

I agree with Carolyn Nordstrom (1995:2-9) when she states that violence is not somewhere else, not alien to human existence as we tend to think. It is not separate from the larger society and the cultural dynamics that shape our lives. Violence is an inescapable fact of life, a dimension of living. It is precisely the focus on the everydayness of war that shows how violence is not simply a matter of destruction and death happening to others located in barbaric places but also a matter of reconstruction and survival that implicates us all. People directly affected by political violence use pain as a process of social mediation and transformation (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997:xix), and many groups have mobilized this sense of sharing a painful experience of violence in the past to create political organizations.

In this dissertation, I argue that instead of a weakness of the state (Pécaut 1988), as an explanation of violence, it is necessary to seek such an explanation in the disjointed notions of justice that impede civil society in its efforts to stand up as a whole against armed groups committing atrocities over the last decade with the complicity of the Colombian state. The supposedly democratic Colombian regime has not allowed an effective strengthening of civil society from below. It is a fragmented society: higher public representatives and local elites obtain economic benefits derived from rural and local political power; vibrant peace-building initiatives that people directly affected by war carry out from below, with the support of NGOs as well as their newly created grass- root social movements; apathetic civil society middle-class sectors not affected by this conflict who uncritically endorse the government hard-line against terrorists; guerrillas who think of armed actions as the only way to get the

*pueblo*'s claims for social justice heard; and paramilitaries who believe in the effectiveness of terror to create a new social order which they will dominate.

The question of how violence marginalizes people who have lived on the border of the Colombian state rule and now are evicted and strive to regain a lost social status presents many dilemmas. First, there is a dilemma for the anthropologist and his or her self-positioning within this field of study. Second, there is a dilemma about the humanitarian response and the reproduction it usually makes of marginalization and victimization. Third, there is a dilemma for the internally-displaced people's own positioning against these dominant humanitarian discourses.

All too often, people's misfortunes invaded my dreams. Did my insomnia indicate that my empathy with my informants was turning into identification? Eventually, I learned how to distance myself from the suffering I experienced while dealing with others' pain and sorrow. I could not blame people who lived comfortably for the tragedies and miseries of others, but neither could I anesthetize myself inside the bubble of Colombian bourgeois life knowing that all this suffering was taking place here and now. Was distancing a routinization of human suffering and the extensively-analyzed violence-as-usual (Taussig 1992) that characterizes Colombia?

I cannot forget Antonio's willingness to *salir adelante*, to go ahead with his life, which is an expression that many people use in Colombia to mean "the struggle to succeed in life." He was a young and lively man with witty bright black eyes who came from Cartagena del Chairá, in the province of Caquetá. We exchanged phone numbers because he was leaving The House of Migrants that day and I wanted to keep in touch with him. Some months later, I called him and set up an appointment. He showed me with pride an oven,

some tables and molds to make bread and pizzas. He had acquired and stored these items in a dark humid room shared with another family. His room was located in Patio Bonito District, Bogotá. Antonio carefully separated the sleeping, eating, and bathroom spaces of his room with flimsy drapes. Back in Caquetá, he had been one of the few to own a bakery. I felt he believed that I would be able to help him in some way. He probably kept that hope alive for some months. I was sure such a talented baker who had once owned his own small business, a motorbike and a home, could have an opportunity in this city. Sadly, however, I was never able to help him in any concrete way.

I developed a love-hate relationship with the topic of my dissertation, to the extent that I thought of abandoning it several times due to the ethical dilemmas I had when people turned to me for help. Also, it filled me with sadness. What kept my interest and involvement alive was to stand against the indifference to what was happening to people forced to live in other worlds and realities. What brought me back to such a difficult and sad subject was the desire to find out more about this pain people were talking about and the resourceful ways in which they were coping with the silencing effects of violence.

As an unconformable Colombian anthropologist studying contemporary political violence and the way war injures but does not kill people's political agency, the suffering of others invades my unresolved feelings of solitude and malaise amidst Colombian society's contradictions and lies. These lies are mainly related to the secure and untouched sectors of Colombian society that refuse to question the brutality of war and the consent to kill given to the state, the insurgent groups, the army and the proxy paramilitary armies. At the same time, as an ethnographer, I had to keep a wise distance from a close sharing of feelings with the men and women I knew in order not to repeat the sentimentality that floods studies of this

subject. I needed to establish straight and reciprocal relationships with my informers to counter the heavy weight of institutions profiting from their suffering.

### **The Battle of the Oaks**

I followed Don Pedro's trajectory of displacement between 2003 and 2004. His case illustrates better than any other the complex intricacies that make Colombian conflict such a global laboratory of war, the failed efforts of a citizen to claim for accountability and rights from an inefficient judicial system, and the support he gets from NGOs and foundations on juridical advocacy. It describes the journey undertaken by a person who has to navigate throughout different national, international, juridical and humanitarian orders to assert his rights as a citizen and as an internally-displaced person who finds out that he cannot follow his old convictions if he wants to survive in the city of Bogotá.

Don Pedro is a man of about 40 years old, but he considers himself older. He is from Tambo, Cauca and he has not been able to find a job in the city. He always carried a big folder with piles of certificates issued by a long list of offices where he had been asking for juridical assistance in Bogotá: Defensoría del Pueblo<sup>24</sup>, Attorney Office, Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Senado<sup>25</sup>, Fiscalía<sup>26</sup>, Canadian Embassy, UNCHR office, País Libre, Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo<sup>27</sup>, Oficina Jurídica de la Universidad del Rosario<sup>28</sup>. He would like his story to be published in a book entitled "The Battle of the Oaks" to make reference to the farm he had to abandon a couple of years ago in the Cauca Valley. He used to work there as

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<sup>24</sup> Ombudsman

<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Office of the Senate

<sup>26</sup> District Attorney's office

<sup>27</sup> Corporation of lawyers José Alvear Restrepo.

<sup>28</sup> Juridical Office from the Universidad del Rosario

a sharecropper in El Cerrito, Valle on a Hacienda called La Laguna. Intervention by the INCORA<sup>29</sup> office had given him the title of a plot of land where he carried out an ecological project taking care of oaks. He also took care of somebody else's farm. Don Pedro told me that one day a man interested in cutting down the oaks to sell them and share the benefits with Don Pedro visited him. As they were cutting the biggest oak, the electrical saw got stuck. Don Pedro was hit by the saw and got thrown various meters away when the saw kicked loose. He was unconscious and sent to the hospital. His kidney was severely damaged and they needed to extract it. Half- unconscious in the hospital he had a dream: he was walking by his mother through a path bordered with oaks. There were people going back and forth from a big church. His mother disappeared as she was indicating with her finger that he could not follow her. From then on, Don Pedro made the promise of not cutting down any of the trees of his farm. He decided to set up an ecological project to preserve the water springs on his land and to get funding for it. His project was well received and he embraced a state law that benefited people who protect sources of water. In the neighboring farm a group of drug traffickers connected to guerrilla groups had a laboratory and kidnapped his neighbor. Don Pedro decided to denounce the case before the GAULA<sup>30</sup> that promised him protection and monetary benefits from the anti-drug programs that the Colombian State has signed with the Drug Enforcement Administration of the US Department of Justice. An army commander congratulated and extolled him: "the big decisions make men bigger," he told him. With Don Pedro as their informant, they were able to destroy the drug laboratory, but they did not capture any of the members of the drug-

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<sup>29</sup> Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria, Institute of the Colombian Agrarian Reform

<sup>30</sup> Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal, Colombian Army Groups of Unified Action dealing with cases of threats, kidnapping and extortion

trafficker band. The persecution started right away. As he was walking to his house with his son, he was stopped by a group of threatening men who were about to kill him. Don Pedro told me that in that very moment a nest of bees flew from a nearby tree and attacked the group of men. That event saved he and his son's lives. The guerrilla group offered 20 millions pesos (nearly 9,000 dollars) as a reward for the person providing information about the *sapos* that denounced them. Don Pedro started to flee: he stayed some time in Yumbo but the threats continued, and he decided to go to Bogotá. There he stayed some days at the House of Migrants which, according to Don Pedro, is the only responsible institution *vis-à-vis* internally-displaced people. He was also very thankful to the help that the sellers of the biggest grocery distribution market in Bogotá called CORABASTOS<sup>31</sup> provided him. They gave him food on a weekly basis. Thanks to the contacts with the House of Migrants he found a small house to live in Engativá, the western part of the city. However, a few months later his daughter found an envelope under their door with a warning note: "Receive our red and black salutation. This is to remind you the debt you have with us for *sapo* and wherever you go we will find you." He had to move right away that same day and he found a room in the same district but he was determined to leave the country. He blamed the Colombian government for his situation. Institutions he had resorted to hadn't been of any help so he decided to embrace the International Humanitarian Law. Some friends of his could have got asylum in Canada thanks to the intervention of Amnesty International and he wants to follow their example. He filled out the application and presented all his papers to the Canadian Embassy. He wrote them a letter where he affirmed that laws in Colombia hadn't recognized him as a citizen with

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<sup>31</sup> Corporación de abastos de Bogotá S. A., Bogotá Corporation of Food Provision.

rights and that he would like to move to their beautiful country. He was called for an interview in December of 2003 but soon he got a reply from the embassy telling him they rejected his application. Don Pedro presumed that the fact that he had sued the Colombian state makes him problematic before the eyes of the embassy's functionaries.

In his despair he told me he was going to talk directly with the guerrilla front that operated in the area where he had his property and that he planned to get an interview with them. I advised him not to do so. In our last encounter he told me that he had decided to cross the border with Ecuador. He called me from Ecuador and told me he has found many other Colombians in the same situation and that they know the routes and connections to migrate to Canada. He also told me that he presented his case before the UNCHR office in Quito. But Ecuador had as many problems as Colombia so the best thing would be to apply to a third country.

Don Pedro's persistence in a juridical battle as a Colombian citizen gets thwarted by the continuous threats and lack of protection under which he undertakes the defense of his life and property. He played with fire by denouncing drug trafficking-guerrilla groups and he made a mistake by resorting to the army, and the police for protection. He was able to remain sturdy as an oak but despite his endurance he had to keep moving and was forced to cross the southern Colombian international border. Don Pedro's case illustrates the way in which an individual gets caught by the powerful circuits of dirty war in Colombia and how he is able to move through the historical and global structures that determine his transformation: from a labor migrant to an informer; from an internally-displaced person to an international refugee.

## **Scheme of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In the first, “Geopolitics of War in Historical Light” I argue that armed groups have been using forced displacement to create mobile and temporary sovereignties imposing control over young civilian populations that they need as laborers and soldiers. Forced displacement has been shaped historically by relations of power over land in which various techniques of eviction have permeated collective discourses and imaginations. I discuss how people experience what Allen Feldman (1995:234) has called “rumor somatized” when facing the fear that armed actors will forcibly recruit their children in the places they have abandoned. From 2002 to 2004, an unprecedented paramilitary offensive carried out to eliminate guerrilla strongholds and civilian activism seems to be at the service of state plans to defeat insurgency and establish a new regime of global economies of extraction that have had left unprecedented social and ecological transformations (Escobar 2003). Three political processes illustrate the current political context in which this research has been conducted: a) the so-called “Plan Colombia” or US military and financial intervention; b) the peace dialogues with paramilitaries that constitute one more chapter of impunity in Colombian history; and c) the free trade agreement with the U.S that is currently under negotiation.

In chapter two, “Mobility, Victimhood and Place” I discuss how the substantial body of literature on forced displacement lacks articulation with theories of migration depicting forced displacement as a tragedy. A broad array of governmental, non-governmental, and international humanitarian organizations have set a legal normative framework through which humanitarian assistance is provided and on which people have come to depend. Interviewees for this research think that forced displacement has taken away dreams and



projects and that it has deeply marked them. However, they oppose humanitarian models that freeze them as victims, culture-less or disabled people. I argue that forced displacement is not only a violent event or a definite disconnection from places but a process that link populations on the move, communities that stayed behind and the new web of networks that they establish along their journeys.

In chapter three, “Remembering the Place of Before”, I discuss how internally displaced interviewees use the memory of an idealized place of before as a carefully chosen political and subjective discourse. Sensorial and affective dimensions reconnect people with their lands, landscapes, possessions and social practices activated by embodied acts in the present. People I interviewed present their homeland using the image of a fixed and idyllic portrait of a culturally and naturally wealthy, beautiful and peaceful place that does not necessarily correspond to the various locations in which they have lived and the sites from which they have just been expelled due to political persecution. All of them have had an intense life history of migration: they have moved from one farm to another, from one town to another, and from towns to the cities; they have been agricultural migrants, traders, and community leaders. This idealization is used differently by the groups of people I worked with as indices of respectability to claim new citizenship spaces in the city.

In chapter four “The Battle Over Land and the Politics of Ethnicity” I analyze the discourse of ethnic organizations of internally displaced people who use strategically the 1991 Constitutional new rights as well as the global discourses on culture, nature, and multiculturalism, to present themselves as the holders of an alternative politics against war. Indigenous people affirm that they are spiritually connected to their territories and culturally

ecological defenders of nature; Afro-Colombians assert that they are promoters of harmonic relations with their environment and have their own notion of development.

In chapter five, “Reconstruction and the City” I describe several practices of reinsertion that form part of an interplay of utopia and dystopia for members of these communities as they are transformed into permanent inter-urban nomads and under-skilled workers. I also address how Andean agricultural workers put in practice former leadership practices to create a vibrant network of community organizations independent of the state and with close links with humanitarian NGOs and agencies and to materialize their most valuable dreams: housing projects and entrepreneurial projects to promote economic autonomy and emotional recovery.

Articulating defiant and active global political resistance from the core of the country (Bogotá), indigenous people have looked for allies among other social groups and have discovered common claims against the current model of development and modernity. If in the past they were pushed off their lands to the jungle and the headwaters or the summits of the mountains, now they are removed again into the cities because their lands have acquired a new strategic value *vis-à-vis* the global economy.

As Afro-Colombians manipulate the stereotypes that dominant society has about them, they demonstrate an incredible courage to counter adversity and racism. The Afro-Colombian community masters subtle urban codes while keeping strong ties with their home towns to cope with a disadvantageous and unequal urban environment.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Geopolitics of War in Historical Light**

In this chapter, I characterize the current Colombian conflict as a “war” and forced displacement as its main effective technique based on the interviews I carried out at the House of Migrants in Bogotá during the first phase of my fieldwork. I report on people’s descriptions of the techniques of repression, persecution, surveillance, menace, and terror to demonstrate how through visits, distribution of death lists, and rumors, armed groups impose arbitrary regimes and create an atmosphere of confusion and anxiety in more than two thirds of the total number of Colombian rural municipalities. People narrate how armed groups threaten to abduct their children and use them as laborers, spies, soldiers, and cultivators of illegal crops.

To answer why forced displacement has been a prevalent technique of war throughout Colombian history I argue that instead of a rule of Law, the Colombian state has had a limited sovereignty over its territory enabling and promoting the use of its lands as sources of legal and illegal wealth and local forms of political power. This form of governing has resulted in an incredibly violent way of resolving land-tenure disputes as well as an extreme mobility and constant relocation of Colombian rural populations.

The logic of the war has important historical antecedents. I propose to trace the following historical processes of Colombian violence: an uneven presence of the state during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century accompanied by an old agrarian system of peonage; the emergence of rebel movements in response to an exclusionary bipartisan political system; the failure of peace talks with guerrilla groups and the subsequent extermination of the left; the

gradual strengthening in terms of the military power of both armed groups (guerrillas and paramilitaries) through drug-trafficking financing; and the dominance of paramilitary groups after 1995.

In order to provide a clear picture of who the main actors involved in this situation of competing sovereignties are and how they implement a rule of violence and terror that resonates with colonial domination, I use newspaper information as well as the content of these armed groups' web pages to analyze their programs, ideological discourses, and the way they interfere in the allocation of public resources, political elections, distribution of agricultural work, and people's everyday life in territories transformed into their privatized "fatherlands."

I argue that after 1995 the Colombian conflict spread out like never before due to global factors such as the War against Drugs and the War on Terrorism. In this research I am analyzing a period (2002-2004) in which there is a clear geo-politics directed to reestablish state sovereignty through the use of paramilitary proxies in an attempt to control old guerrilla strongholds that had spread and proliferated since the 1960s. To understand the agenda behind this geopolitics as well as the current political context of this research, I discuss three processes that converge during this period: a) the so-called "Plan Colombia" or US military and financial intervention that forms part of the global anti-terrorist crusade, b) the peace dialogues with paramilitaries that seem to constitute one more chapter of impunity in Colombian history and c) the free trade agreement with the U.S that is currently under negotiation to consolidate the neo-liberal reforms that were initiated in the early 1990s.

Finally, to elucidate where forced displacement is taking place, I have elaborated a geography of war indicating the main regions affected by a demographic reordering of land-

tenure and a redistribution of labor in a big scale based on local reports produced by International Amnesty. The areas where my interviewees come from coincide with regions where one of the armed actors has taken recent control of these areas.

### **Is it a War?**

Is the Colombian current conflict a civil war? Armed groups forcibly involve civilian populations in this conflict. Clearly most of the civilians are not strongly engaged with one or the other side, and therefore, do not participate voluntarily in the war. However, poor sectors of the young Colombian population are constantly recruited by the army, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries. Since the mid 1990s this war has resulted in the destruction of social ties and the division of civil society. Yet, it is not a war that can be called “genocide” since it does not entail the massive exterminations of entire populations characterized as “internal enemies” but rather control over local populations by local political powers through a small numbers of killings. Some of the experts on violence in Colombia, like Daniel Pécaut (1999), call this conflict “war against society.” Eric Lair (1999) describes it as “war by interposed populations,” meaning that armed groups systematically use and remove civil populations as a strategy of war. War is often perpetrated in Colombia by private armed actors who defend their own political, economic and military interests. In this sense, it is not an insurgent project based on collective projects or aspirations. Clearly it is an “undeclared war against civilian populations” (Lair 1999:98).

Armed groups avoid face-to-face combat, and most of their victims are civilians. They use the removal of populations as a strategy of war. In particular, terror and forced displacement are instruments to kill and expel populations and to recruit cheap laborers.

Intermittent cruel massacres have gotten more effective military results than continuous massive killings. Armed groups use populations in legal and illegal economic activities, the exploitation of mineral resources, the cultivation of illegal crops, kidnapping, extortion, and robbery. They use populations as human shields to hide among, or as means to escape or get food and supplies. In this strategy of indirect confrontation, the population passes from the rule of one to that of another constantly (Lair 1999:96).

### **Techniques of Fear**

In most of the cases I know, forced displacement occurs when the power held by one of the armed group shifts. People living in an area are automatically labeled collaborators of the enemy by the new armed group in power. The shift of power is announced by the new armed group by besieging a village or municipality the new armed group is controlling. After a guerrilla group take-over of a municipality, the national army usually bombs the region indiscriminately with the famous “phantom plane” (it is noiseless) and then leaves. The strategies that armed groups employ are: “destruction and killing” followed by “socio-spatial control.” The new armed group starts by “cleaning” the area of enemies and ensuring its total micro- hegemony over it. It is nearly impossible to maintain neutrality. People are compelled to show allegiances, otherwise they will be called *sapos*. This can be translated as frogs, meaning people who play both sides, unreliable people. At that moment, people start to feel paranoia, *nervios*, (nervousness) and annoyance. They do not know when the newly-arrived armed groups are going to visit them and interrogate them about issues they don’t know how to answer. What they fear the most is the possible abduction of their children.

It is important to notice that it is not a definite, long take-over. The new armed group usually stays three or four days and then disappears. Armed groups use people's houses or farms to rest and get provisions. After one of the groups leaves town, the opposing armed group may come and settle accounts with those who allegedly helped the enemy.

Armed groups need boys and girls as soldiers, companions and cooks for the troops. That is why interviewees talk of armed groups luring and taking their children to join them. People try to send their children away, to stay with family members until they know what the intruders are going to do with their properties and belongings.

Various techniques scare people to leave out. The first one consists of taking actions against those suspected of collaborating with the enemy. They can spread rumors that such people will get tied up and dismembered, or they can actually do it. They say (*dicen que*) that people get arrested, tortured or disappeared, that a nephew got kidnapped, an uncle killed, a husband disappeared or a brother recruited. "By producing victims and delivering corpses, armed groups exhibit and symbolically affirm their own power" (Lair 1999:97).

The second technique consists of controlling the town so that people cannot freely circulate. People say that armed groups "close everything" (*cierran todo*) meaning that they block the main roads that connect the municipality to the rest of the region. They set up check points so people cannot sell their crops and products freely. They destroy grocery stores so people are denied supplies. They establish curfews so that nobody can go out on the streets after 8 pm. People have to show their identity cards upon request. They may have to give most of their harvest and livestock to armed men, who sometimes even set up limits on the amount of cash (50,000 pesos this is US \$20) a person can carry in his/her wallet to

regulate their purchases and errands. They issue work permits to recruit young people to work in the coca fields, or serve as soldiers, or as builders of bridges, roads or trails.

Another technique, widely used by the paramilitaries, consists of gathering everyone in the town plaza. They organize a meeting in which they issue and read aloud the names of suspects or people who are considered military targets. They impose ultimatums on the people on that list, i.e., mandatory deadlines (often 12 hours), to abandon the area. If the people remain after these deadlines, they will be systematically killed.

Armed groups also use another technique that consists of sending some of their emissaries to visit families suspected of having previously hosted the enemy. These first visits are undertaken in the guise of friendly acquaintances, and they interrogate them about the type of relationship they had with the previous armed group, the kind of food they gave them, and how often they were visited by them. They spend all day long on the farm where these families work and live and the people are expected to prepare food and serve drinks. There is a tacit understanding that nobody can go out or work during such visits. It is a friendly, temporary take over.

Later on, they make a second visit that takes the form of an open and violent threat. They send rude people with rude manners, to mess up their homes. On some occasions, they may abduct one male member of the families. On other occasions, interviewees' husbands are killed in front of them and their children. They are remembered as having "faces that cut your body" and as insulting men who threaten them with possible abducting of their children. They too spend the whole day in people's homes and they order that food be served. During this visit, they set a twelve-hour ultimatum to leave the zone. People know this is their death sentence and they leave as soon as possible.



As a woman I interviewed explains, armed groups inculcate fear in a municipality slowly. First they send very kind people, but later horrifying people who are in charge of threats and expulsions. This woman referred to the contaminating character of these people's faces using the verb *cortar* which in the folk language means to decompose:

A few days after they came, fifteen days later, they arrived with more of their people but they were people that one cannot turn to look at their faces. These are terrible faces. I don't know if it is because they are so evil that one cannot look at them because it is terrible, the *susto*, their gaze only makes you sick, the way in which they talk because they are not polite as the first ones that they sent. This is like a strategy, first they send over soft people, very friendly, very approachable people, but then people who are terrible come later on. (woman from Miravalle, Meta, 27 years old)<sup>32</sup>

Those who did not get these visits but were friends or family members could not inquire about these deaths. In fact, armed groups prohibited people from picking up dead bodies. Relatives of disappeared people started feeling things were going awry (*las cosas se ponen malucas*) or that the situation had gotten bad (*la situación se pone mala*). People's dogs got poisoned, or it was rumored that dead bodies were found floating in the river. It was time to organize, keeping their plans for leaving secret. Some neighbors advised them to get out of there (*que se pierdan*) they say. There was silence about the causes of the violent deaths taking place in the town. They recalled how everybody saw armed groups on an everyday basis and nobody could say anything.

As I have just shown, forced displacement included various techniques to inculcate fear and ensure total hegemony in a given community. What the current regime of violence does to thousands of civilians is a form of high-intensity communal torture. The middle and upper classes in the Andean central cities do not feel it and do not want to know about it. But

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<sup>32</sup> Y a los poquitos días que nos llegaron, a los quince días nos llegaron con más gente de ellos pero es gente que uno no puede voltear a mirar a la cara, son caras terribles o yo no sé si por lo malos que son pero no puede uno mirarlos a ellos porque es terrible, el susto, la sola mirada a uno le *cortan* todo, en la forma que le hablan porque no son decentes como los primeros que le mandan a uno, eso es como estrategia, mandan gente muy suave, muy querida, muy tratable, pero después viene gente que es terrible.

people who have been displaced know very well that, by inflicting fear, forced displacement effectively destroys open and free political speech and community practices. Violence has the destructive effect of causing victims to lose temporarily their capacity to empathize with others who have suffered similar threats and losses and to connect with the social world around them (Daniel 1996).

First, fear is an immediate individual bodily sensation provoked by an unexpected event perceived as dangerous or by the lack of information about one's circumstances. Feldman's expression "rumor somatized" illustrates the way in which interviewees described how terror was felt in the body (Feldman 1995:234). A woman from Castillo in the province of Meta whom I interviewed described this bodily fear created by a paramilitary visit. She remembered especially the group's uniforms and use of hidden codes to inculcate fear by means of announcing their possible abduction:

So my husband was scared and me too because the *susto* gets into you, one cannot eat, even if one makes good home food, from the countryside. It does not taste the same, one cannot sleep, or eat; our son [was] traumatized because when he saw somebody dressed in military [clothes] he said that they were paramilitaries. The fear was that they were going to abduct us because they talked with their codes. There was a moment in which the paramilitary commander spoke: "we are gonna get the business done they are ready"; so in this moment we thought we were going to be victims. (woman from Miravalle, meta, 27 years old)<sup>33</sup>

Fear is also feeling of apprehension about what exactly has happened and what is to happen next, disturbing, worrying thoughts that afflict you, "ideas which hurt all the time and from which one might die" (James 1997:126). The realm of the unknown does not refer only

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<sup>33</sup> Entonces mi esposo asustado y yo también porque eso a uno le entra un susto terrible, uno no puede comer, por más que la comida la haga uno buena, así en el campo, a uno no le sabe igual, no duerme, no come; el niño traumatizado porque él miraba a alguien vestido de militar y decía que eran paramilitares. El miedo era que se lo llevaran a uno porque como hablaban con sus claves. Hubo un momento en que el comandante de los paramilitares habló: "ya vamos a hacer la vuelta y están listos"; pues uno en ese momento piensa ya vamos a ser víctimas.

to present dangerous circumstances but also to a sense of missing information and failing memory, especially about the fate of disappeared persons. Not knowing the causes of a terror-inducing act or event makes it more effective (Feldman 1995).

Terror is a high-powered medium of domination that draws on the creation of an uncertain reality out of fiction that Michael Taussig calls “epistemic murk” in which you do not know what is true and what is illusion (1986:121). Fear fabricates an ambiguous and blurring semantic reality; it imposes an atmosphere of anxiety and makes people doubt their own perceptions of reality (Green 1995:60)

Explanations of violent acts based on what is heard, seen, and imagined circulate. Silence and rumor fabricate a social reality made out of indefinite half- secrets. Something said or not said about what was done to whom by whom (Green 1995:5) constitutes a search for meaning asserted through exaggeration and imaginative supplementation.

Now, six months ago they said that they had disappeared also one of the family members and that, later, the dogs and chickens walked around eating pieces of meat. (Woman from Tumaco, Nariño, 50 years old)<sup>34</sup>

Fear also instills confusion and uncertainty in people’s everyday lives through distrust and rumors. Fear’s effectiveness resides in its indistinctiveness, ambiguity and confusion it creates about rules and about the people who surround you. In this sense fear destabilizes social relations by inculcating a wedge of distrust among members of the same family, neighbors, friends and *paisanos*. The expression ‘you cannot trust anyone’ has become a main social premise everywhere in Colombia.

Kay Warren (1993) examined the logics of terror in Guatemala employed by militaries during the eighties. She saw a parallel world of betrayal and distrust coexisting

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<sup>34</sup> Ahora, hace como unos seis meses *me contaron* que habían desaparecido también a uno de los familiares y que después salían los perros y las gallinas sacando pedazos de carne.

with an apparent everyday life with no disruptive events. This created a community world in which suddenly people were not who they appeared to be and people were not certain who was a betrayer. This is a world poisoned with skepticism about social relations, not knowing who is who or with whom one lives (Warren 1993:47). In Colombia, people from rural municipalities are singled out by guerrillas or paramilitaries who use them as informants to gather information about people suspected of collaborating with the enemy. Spies and informers among neighbors serve precisely to infuse terror from within the community. Maria Victoria Uribe (2004:85) defines the role spies have played during the earlier and the current waves of violence in Colombia:

*Sapos* [are] social agents who come from deep within the community but [turn] against it by pointing out some of its members for extermination (...) the figure of the *sapo* thus condenses all of the ambiguity inherent in the neighbor-stranger dyad (2004:85).

I agree with Allen Feldman (1995:231) when he says that rumor is a collective experience that arises in the absence of wide-scale social credibility. People use rumor to cope with surveillance and monitoring. But armed groups also spread rumor to propagate fear and obtain information. Rumor, like the talk of crime that Teresa Caldeira (2000) examines in São Paulo, Brazil, circulates widely producing more fear and violence. City dwellers in São Paulo make sense of crime through a symbolic re-organization of the world based on the elaboration of prejudices and practices of segregation. In the case of Colombian displacement, armed groups try to produce chaos and confusion through rumors so people who stay in besieged towns adopt strategies of silence until they find their ways to flee the area.

To understand how fear of violence operates and spreads we can take the case of torture and massacres, actions materially enacted on other people's bodies that can also

become rumors when people disappear and are transformed into anonymous, absent corpses. People say that they saw a neighbor's body tied to a pole, and other people say that they saw a family member's body floating in the river. Rumors of violence operate through macabre forms of uncertainty producing fictions based on fantasies and paranoia. It is a brutal technique transforming friends into monsters, ordinary faces into abominations.

The body is the site where these violent excesses are enacted and where armed men inflict the painful inscriptions on individuals. Perpetrators of massacres attempt to dehumanize the bodies by means of mutilation and dismemberment. By objectifying the bodies of the enemy, armed groups are demonstrating the desire to eliminate the other literally. In one of the interviews, Graciela, an important community leader from the Pacific Coast, described the extermination that her extended family had experienced:

So then, before coming here [arriving to Bogotá] they killed four cousins. They cut their feet, their legs, arms, head, they opened them up and they cut their penises. One only finds the body and then after a hand, sometimes a leg, like this, each thing in different place (...) One part of my family is still in Tumaco but living with fear. They don't say a word, they are scared (Woman from Tumaco, Nariño, 50 years old)<sup>35</sup>

Obviously the killing of beloved members of their families, especially men, is the most painful aspect of displacement. Some of the women I interviewed could not even attend the burial of their husbands or never did claim their bodies. They were processing their grief at the loss of their husbands, and the interviews were scarred by this affliction. Interviewees find yet more painful what for them are inexplicable deaths, these are, abnormal deaths. They find these deaths particularly painful because they generate feelings of impotence, anger and rage in them and their children. The harm that forced displacement has caused goes beyond

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<sup>35</sup> Así pues, antes de venirme mataron cuatro primos hermanos, les cortaron los pies, las piernas, los brazos, la cabeza, los abrieron y les cortaban el pene. No más se encontraba el cuerpo y después una mano, a veces una pierna así cada cosa por su lado (...) Una parte de mi familia sigue en Tumaco, pero con miedo. Nunca dicen nada, atemorizados.

such indignation; it directly hampers their expectations, and plans for a life trajectory. Forced displacement has impeded them from keeping their individual and collective dreams of a better life. When forced displacement takes place just after a massacre involving various members of a family, people said that armed groups tried to exterminate them (*acabarlos*). This was a direct attempt to destroy specific family and community projects.

The techniques of fear described above do not correspond only to pre-modern and irrational behaviors of armed groups. The use of fear as a form of domination exacerbates violence when the state is incapable of imposing a homogeneous rule of law and encourages its use by private armies who acquire lands and political power. In order to understand the equation of fear and land I propose a new reading of the history of violence in Colombia that explains how the creation of competing sovereignties aimed at protecting an economy of war has produced a society in which violence constitutes an alternative form of labor for many poor young agricultural workers.

### **A History of Violence Revisited**

Colombian history has been a continuous account of various types of violence: 52 civil wars during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, inter-party violence during the 1950s and 1960s, drug trafficking-related violence from the 1980s until today, and now urban militias, displacements, and land evictions. Contrary to ethnic wars or the wars related to the awakening of nationalisms that have taken place in the Balkans or in the new states emerging from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s, this armed conflict is not related to ethnic and nationalistic hatred but to a dispute over land between two “illegal” armed groups

(guerrillas and paramilitaries) and the army of the Colombian state that has failed to defeat the guerrillas and has often endorsed the actions of the paramilitaries.

In contrast to the history of military regimes in Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela, Colombian violence is not solely a state-sponsored terror. Instead, terror in Colombia is disseminated and perpetrated by various armed groups (including the army) that are competing for sovereignties over land and resources. Unlike some states in Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo), the Colombian state has faltered but has not collapsed. Many studies have referred to the chronic weakness of the Colombian state (Pécaut 1988). I propose that instead of “violence” we should call this “a geo-warfare” because armed groups as well as powerful national and transnational actors are competing over wealth. Consequently, we should focus on the way these various contestants operate. Important recent anthropological and political studies (Ramirez 2001, Romero 2003) have shed light on how rural poor populations in Colombia perceive the state, the guerrillas and paramilitaries. People in rural areas see the state as remote and careless, an insufficient state which has abandoned its citizens (Ramirez 2001); they also see it as a semi-privatized state in the hands of political and economic clienteles allocating favors and public resources to each other. Although rural social movements’ claims resonate with some of the guerrilla’s political discourses, they do not trust guerrilla’s use of terror and violence. Landowners and local elites think paramilitaries have brought peace and security to their properties, whereas human rights activists and the left have experienced paramilitary campaigns to exterminate them (Romero 2003).

Colombia has been referred to as the most long-lived democratic state in Latin America. However, since its creation in 1810, the Colombian state’s territorial sovereignty

has been limited to a network of cities, mines, plantations, and haciendas. The rest of the country has been settled and ruled by military expeditions, private armies, and rebel groups. The Colombian state is not a democracy but a failed democracy that has been shaped through the simulacrum of controlling violence. Instead of achieving an inclusive and visionary societal project or at least a liberal democratic state, Colombian governments have focused on maintaining order and implementing strategies to pacify the country through the indirect governance of local landowners. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the state has invested all its efforts in instilling patriotism as a supreme value, with no links to rights or the exercise of citizenship. Colombian democracy is a disjunctive democracy (Holston and Caldeira 1998) in which several sovereignties compete for a monopoly on violence.

Conflict in Colombia is largely linked to an arbitrary distribution of wealth derived from land that has produced multiple localized bases of power that have prevented the state's monopoly of violence. The historical account that I will present makes clear that land has been used as a source of wealth but also as a way of governing rural municipalities. State officials, businessmen, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug-traffickers have used their lands to exert political power over populations and to recruit them to their economic activities. These groups of landlords have established internal sovereignties within the Colombian state through the exercise of violence over populations.

In 1850, 75% of Colombia's lands were "public lands" (*baldíos*) located in the Amazonian plains, Caribbean valleys and the forest of the Pacific coast (See figure 2). After the 1920s, the state fully engaged in modernizing agriculture through labor and agrarian reforms, reviving a land-tenure reform signed in 1875. People who made "public lands" productive were entitled to claim legal ownership titles over them. Two groups immediately



started competing for lands. On the one hand, there were agricultural businessmen with documented titles over extensive lands issued with the favor of public offices; on the other hand, there were individual migrants who did not have such formal titles but had resided and worked on very small plots of land for 10 to 20 years. Usually, agro-business farmers and traders expanded their *haciendas* by buying cheap plots of lands from *colonos*, expropriating them and hiring the *colonos* informally as farmer-tenants, sharecroppers or rural workers.

A powerful bipartisan political system allowed the Colombian ruling class to gradually reverse these reformist social policies and a more extensive extensive distribution of land. The two main political parties (liberals identified with the red color and conservatives identified with the blue color) operated as a big segmentary clientelistic system from top to bottom. Urban political elites commanded and ensured rural electoral votes through local landowners or *gamonales* in charge of recruiting party loyalties among the peasantry, using land allocation and economic protection to enforce party allegiances.

During the 1940s and 1950s, a charismatic leader from the left, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, denounced the abuse against sharecroppers and farmer tenants. His programs of wealth redistribution and expanded political participation produced an incredible social mobilization. Soon, he was perceived as a serious threat to the traditional bipartisan political machinery and he was assassinated on April 9, 1948. The largest and most violent protest in

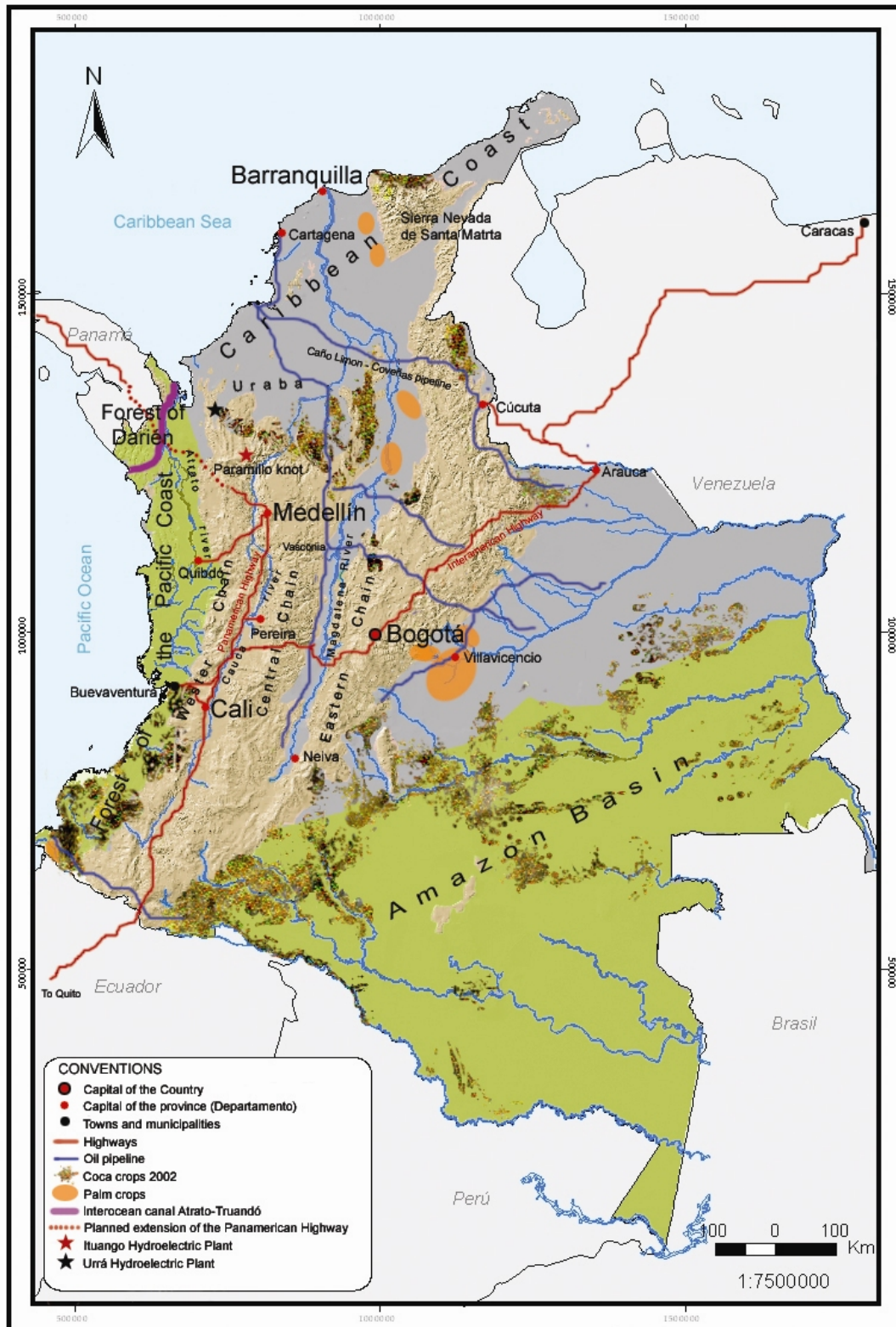


Figure 2: Map of Strategic Resources and Macro-plans

the history of Colombia took place over the next few days. A subsequent civil war lasted throughout 1950s and 1960s, a period known as *La Violencia* that produced 200,000 deaths.

This insurrection gave rise to peasant rebel movements that during the 1960's colonized the southern valleys of the Andean chain of mountains. Small armed groups filled up the vacuum of institutional power and replaced some of the state functions by forming semi-public and semi-clandestine forms of local governments (Braun 1994) or micro-sovereignties.

Liberal and Conservative elites, in order to pacify the country, agreed to alternate in the presidency, ministerial jobs and Congress seats between 1957 and 1973. During that period, called *Frente Nacional*, the government, the media, and wide sectors of the upper classes labeled rural rebels political bandits. The police and the army killed several of the rebel leaders between 1963 and 1965.

Rebel peasant movements did not find any political space within this hermetic system of power that banned the participation of any third political party. During the 1970's and 1980's, guerrillas created a "social basis of support" in relatively isolated areas (the Middle Magdalena valley, the lower Cauca Valley, and the eastern planes of the Amazon). Their political agendas focused on social justice through agrarian reform.

Two main guerrilla groups that were created in the 1960s are still active in the current conflict. The FARC is the oldest (founded in 1964), the largest, and the most powerful, controlling the cultivation and processing of coca leaves in the southern part of the country (Putumayo and Meta provinces) and exerting control over some Andean production areas. The ELN<sup>36</sup> was inspired by the Cuban Revolution (founded in 1965) and is well known for its frequent terrorist actions against the north-eastern oil pipelines. Then there is

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<sup>36</sup> Ejército de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Army.

the EPL<sup>37</sup> inspired by the Maoist experience and founded in 1963. Not very large, it surrendered its weapons during the peace negotiations of 1991 and had control over the Pacific banana zone called Urabá. Other guerrilla groups like the M-19<sup>38</sup> and the Quintín Lame Armed Movement were also dismantled in 1991. According to their discourses, they fight consists of improving the *pueblo's* standard of living, and achieve dignified lives for people with peace and social justice.

Activities related to drug trafficking have permeated Colombian social and political life since the 1970s adding alliances between mafioso groups, state officials, and armed actors. Cattle-ranchers, gold traders, and commercial farmers often finance the cultivation of coca crops in hard-to-reach areas like the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta or the Amazon basin and sell the coca to the trafficking organizations called cartels. During the 1980s and 1990s, the coca boom attracted former migrants who lived in those areas as well as various part-time rural workers who got hired as cultivators and pickers (Thoumi 2003). People in municipalities were offered good wages to cultivate illegal crops. In 1997, Alejandro Reyes showed that drug-traffickers had purchased 37% of the best lands in Colombia, lands mainly destined for timber exploitation, oil-palm extraction and cattle-ranching.

An important series of peace negotiations between the government and different guerrilla groups took place from 1984 to 1992. This contributed to the creation of a vigorous political movement by new political parties from the left, such as the Unión Patriótica (UP)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ejército Popular de Liberación, Popular Army of Liberation

<sup>38</sup> Movimiento 19 de abril, April 19 Movement. Alluding to the date of its foundation April 19, 1970 when their political movement candidate Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was defeated in the supposedly fraudulent presidential elections of that year. This group was responsible for the seizing of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá in November 1985.

<sup>39</sup> Patriotic Union Party

and the Alianza Democrática M-19<sup>40</sup> that participated in the Constitutional Reform of 1991. This vibrant innovation in politics in Colombia was soon thwarted by a campaign to exterminate this movement with the killing of approximately 3,500 of its activists by 1992. This war against the left was followed by a radical turning point in the guerrillas' strategies. They divided and augmented their command systems and fighting fronts and they diversified their sources of financing adding extortion, robbery and kidnapping, and drug trafficking. Since then, waves of steadily intensified violence spread out. No longer an ideological driven fight, subversive activities have merged an economy of war (Richani 2002) boosted by the benefits derived from the cultivation of illegal crops. Armed groups also started to hire temporary rural workers to cultivate coca and poppy crops thus leading toward the development of geo-war.

Guerrillas (and later paramilitaries) have finally found the sources of income to achieve their military, social and economic aims: better wages for recruited agricultural workers, better equipments, more sophisticated weapons and more fighters. The FARC grew from 3,500 fighters in 1986 to 8,000 in 1995 and the ELN went from 800 combatants to 3,200 soldiers (Lair 1999:91). In 2001, the guerrillas had control of over one third of Colombia's 1,100 municipalities.

The emergence of paramilitary groups<sup>41</sup> took place during the second half of the 1980s when opponents of the guerrilla groups, particularly landowners and cattle ranchers,

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<sup>40</sup> Name of the political party that members of the M-19 guerilla group created when the peace agreement they signed with the state in 1991.

<sup>41</sup> There has been a long-standing tradition of vigilante groups and private armies called "self-defense groups" in Colombian history: the state-sponsored *policia chulavita* in the 1950s and the liberal party-sponsored *autodefensas campesinas* in the early 1960s.

tired of guerrilla kidnappings, created a group of mercenaries called *Muerte a los secuestradores* (Death to kidnappers).

Paramilitary groups have always moved within prosperous municipalities well-integrated into the national and global economy and controlled by local and regional political elites (Gonzalez et.al 2003). These anti-guerrilla groups gathered under the name of the AUC<sup>42</sup> have presented themselves as civilians and entrepreneurs with the legitimate right of self-defense against terrorist guerrilla attacks.

Although they are not trained by the official military forces, such paramilitary groups have been used to supplement state military actions. In fact, the Colombian army has been perceived as inadequate to defeat the guerrillas. Later, I will explain how the current Uribe government wants to break this de-legitimated image of the armed forces with the adoption of Plan Colombia undertaken in partnership with the United States.

After 1995, there has been an unprecedented aggressive offensive of paramilitaries seeking to take over guerrilla strongholds and expand their impressive territorial holdings. They were approximately 10,000 paramilitary fighters in 2004. Local economic elites often use paramilitaries as agents, so they move freely from north to south across their areas of control (Sanford 2004:259-262). In 2004, paramilitary groups were present in 382 Colombian municipalities (from a total of 1.100 municipalities). Entire communities living in areas traditionally dominated by the guerrillas are now labeled “guerrillas dressed in civilian clothes.”

As part of the military campaign against guerrillas that were called after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 “terrorists,” there is also an intense aerial spraying of coca fields in the southern part of Colombia. *Plan Patriota* launched in 2004 one of the biggest military operation in the

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<sup>42</sup> Auto Defensas Unidas de Colombia, Unified Self-Defense Groups of Colombia

history of Colombia (18,000 soldiers) to recover the southern FARC guerrilla's stronghold has provoked several population displacements (*El Tiempo* May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005:1-6, 1-11).

The previous historical account shows that the emergence of rebel groups has specific historical antecedents related to a failed and exclusionary model of state modernization in Colombia throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The way politics were run and the notion of the public sphere conceived in Colombia throughout its recent history, created the basis for a multiple and fragmented sense of the state presence in its territories. It also demonstrates that the extraction of the land's wealth has become the site for private and clandestine profit that armed groups control thereby producing a disconnected and lawless social order. In the next section I describe the political projects of guerrillas and paramilitaries, the ways they operate, and the discourses they use as evidence of the small-scale temporary and mobile sovereignties they impose.

### **Competing Sovereignties and the Rule of Violence**

The contemporary Colombian countryside is being divided up between "private armies" (Gómez et.al 2003) that have built an ever-changing geography of terror with the establishment of mobile no-go areas (Feldman 1991). In the localities where they dominate, armed groups form military organizations that offer security services such as eradication of criminality and private administration of justice. Both, paramilitaries and guerrillas, derive their finances from illegal economic activities. Both have strong alliances with drug trafficking and the cultivation of illegal crops. Guerrillas also tend to use robbery and kidnapping, and forced taxation and rents as techniques of extortion.

Both, paramilitaries and guerrillas, have political projects aimed at securing their status as legitimate political actors. On their web page, FARC guerrillas present themselves as the army of the *pueblo* and the poor against an oligarchy controlling the Colombian government. To build peace with social justice, they argue, governments need to implement a fair distribution of wealth and respect people's self-determination. "With Bolívar, for peace and national sovereignty" states one of their mottos released in 2000. Inspired by Bolívar's dream of a Latin-American unity, they fight for a real sovereignty and a definite independence from US intervention in Colombia that, according to their discourse, goes hand in hand with the robbery of wealth carried out by multinationals by means of the recent neo-liberal reforms and economic treaties. They invite those who believe in democracy, social justice and the political resolution of Colombian conflict to join their Bolivar Movement for the New Colombia. In their law 003 against corruption, the FARC state that a definite elimination of administrative corruption would only be possible if the current political regime is replaced by an essentially populist one, based on the ethics of the common well being. They agreed in 2000 to issue "law 002 on taxation", a "tax for peace" in which they blackmailed people or juridical entities holding a patrimony bigger than one million dollars. Taking some of the rythms of the national anthem, FARC has released "the anthem of the *pueblo*", addressing parts to Colombian workers who have always been oppressed by those who have ruled the national state. In this song they refer to three principles that supposedly poor Colombians have been deprived of: justice, alluding to the rampant impunity of the Colombian judicial system; truth, alluding to the fallacy of the Colombian state; and a new patriotism opposed to the official national narrative, in which they propose an inclusive national project and loved for the fatherland:



Claiming justice and truth with the pueblo there is, with the first fire of sunrise, the small song of fight and future, born from our guerrillera voice. With Bolívar, Galán, it [the voice] is again riding, no more whipping and pain of the fatherland, we are the pueblo who pursue freedom, building the trail of peace. The secular oppression wants to silence the feeling of the workers. Compañeros raise the flag of peace, the sacred rights of the people. One feels already the ending of the brutal empire, with the arms of the whole America, be for its people peace and happiness, socialist the future will be. FARC guerrilleros, lead the people to triumph for the fatherland, the land, and the bread. FARC guerrilleros, as you hear the voice of unity, go reach the freedom.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, the AUC present themselves as “an armed civil resistance,” an organization of honest cattle-ranchers, farmers, and businessmen whose main goal is to eradicate guerrillas depicted as foolish, barbaric and irrational. This movement has a clear origin: the father of their main commander, Carlos Castaño. He was a cattle rancher from the Caribbean region with strong ties to drug-trafficking who was kidnapped and killed by guerrillas in 1980. To save their family honor and fulfill their duty, Carlos and his brothers organized this movement to secure justice and defend other Colombian families from similar suffering. As opposed to guerrillas, they say they “are balanced and rational people (*cuertos*), educated people with family and kids.” According to their logic, only by defeating the guerrillas can they reactivate regional economies and reestablish harmony between capitalists and workers. The main points of their proposed reforms include a political and democratic reform, a development model, an agrarian reform, an urban planning reform, a policy over energy resources, territorial ordering, judicial reform, and a discussion of drug-trafficking issues related to international law.

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<sup>43</sup> Por justicia y verdad, junto al pueblo ya esta, con el fuego primero del alba, la pequeña canción que nació en nuestra voz, guerrillera de lucha y futuro. Con Bolívar, Galán, ya volvió a cabalgar, no mas llanto y dolor de la patria, somos pueblo que va tras de la libertad, construyendo la senda de paz. La opresión secular, quiere aun acallar, el sentir de los trabajadores. Compañeros alzad la bandera de paz, los sagrados derechos del pueblo. Del imperio brutal ya se siente el final, con los brazos de América toda, a los pueblos la paz y la felicidad, socialista el futuro será. Guerrilleros de las FARC pon el pueblo a triunfar por la patria, la tierra y el pan, guerrilleros de las FARC a la voz de la unidad alcanzad la libertad.

Within the lines of the AUC Paramilitaries' anthem or military march it is possible to read the pillars of their movement: God and reason, as well as an exaltation of a "race" of Spanish descent, men of loyalty, courage, with a civilized sublime accent and with Catholic principles. This song constitutes an ode to the patriotism based on private ownership and worship of Colombia's green landscapes and resources. The AUC paramilitary group presents itself as consisting of redemptory warriors defending those oppressed by subversives in Colombia:

With sublime accent let's intone the glorious notes of the triumphal anthem, for the peace of Colombia look ahead, hail arms of freedom. In the green splendor of your soil, warrior I am, brave and loyal, justice and peace are my desire, hail arms of freedom. Raising our foreheads to the sky we implore from god protection, with my proud voice I proclaim, free Colombia from the oppression. Through plains, mountains and valleys, my watchword is to vanquish or die, our fate victoriously advances. From subversive domination, we have to redeem the people. From Bolivar, Nariño and Christopher Columbus, we are race that fight with courage, heirs of your conquests and dreams, I defend my fatherland with pain. I carry with the compass of my martial march, my rifle, my flag and my faith, my hope, my life, my longing, will always be my devotion, to the immortal fatherland.<sup>44</sup>

In brief, both armed actors create privatized jurisdictions or "fatherlands" where those who dissent are enemies. At the level of elections and municipal administration, armed actors have forced state representatives to create alliances with them so they can have access to the local government functions. Guerrillas and paramilitaries rule by offering protection to those who adhere to their regimes. Within these privatized territorial enclosures, armed groups are kings, dispensers of death, life, punishment, taxation, and justice. They build their

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<sup>44</sup> Con **acento sublime** entonemos, las notas gloriosas del himno triunfal, por la paz de Colombia adelante, salve armas de la libertad. Sobre el **verde esplendor de tu suelo**, guerrero soy, valiente y leal, la justicia y la paz son mi anhelo, gloria a las armas de la libertad. Levantando la frente hacia el cielo, imploramos de **dios** protección, con mi **voz muy altiva** proclamo, Colombia libre, fuera la opresión. Por llanuras, montañas y valles mi consigna es vencer o morir, nuestro destino avanza victorioso, del yugo subversivo al pueblo redimir. De Bolívar, Nariño y Colon, somos **raza** que lucha con valor, heredera de tus gestas y sueños, defendiendo mi patria con dolor. Llevo al compás de mi paso marcial, mi fusil, mi bandera y mi fe, mi esperanza, mi vida, mis ansias, serán siempre mi entrega a la patria inmortal.

reputations and standing on fear and respect obtained through the use and display of violence.

Both the guerrillas and paramilitary groups penetrate all spheres of people's lives. They decide who must stay, who must leave, how they must celebrate, what color their houses should be and what music they should hear. The guerrillas have even established strictly enforced laws prohibiting adultery and the consumption of drugs and alcohol, as well as measures protecting the environment (Taussig 2003:92). The paramilitaries also impose their morality: "no earrings for men, no gay beauty contests, no miniskirts for women, prohibitions of long hair for men, and wearing baseball caps backwards." (Taussig 2003:9, 93)

Strongly performative brutal actions have been the most effective mechanisms used by armed groups to ensure absolute domination over a population that is needed and yet abused. The production of tortured and dismembered bodies and the expulsion of enemies are symbols of the absolute sovereignty of those who display their strength through the naked rule of force.

I propose to address Colombian violence from the perspective of mobile and temporary sovereignties in which armed actors emulate some of the state's functions, offering security to the populations they control because they need them economically and militarily. I think that Michael Taussig (1986) has opened a very interesting approach that is useful to describing the violent and ambiguous relationships between armed powerful groups and the populations they subdue. Taussig traces the formation of a culture of conquest in the case of the Province of Putumayo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where *conquistar* had a double meaning that is relevant to contemporary conflict. The first meaning alludes to the relation of debt-peonage

in which patrons and clients seek each other out because the former needs labor force and the latter protection. The second meaning refers to domination in which the patron will punish or torture the subordinate if he or she does not comply with his desires, yet the client can betray the patron any time using magic. The relationship described is an ambiguous love-hate relationship called by Diane Nelson (1999:7-8) a “fear-laden embrace” in which there is protection and distrust, respect and fear, simultaneously.

The chiefs of the rubber worker-teams alluded to by Taussig needed a hated object (the indigenous labor force), one associated until very recently with wilderness, savagery, and ignorance. Subordinates also needed a patron to connect themselves with networks that would open the possibility of climbing the social ladder for future generations. In a similar way, armed actors in the current war need the populations under their jurisdiction to increase their economic and military strength, and they ensure their obedience through the use of terror and violence. People who join armed groups find in these organizations protection and the symbolic power of arms in the face of a national state that cannot offer them a better destiny.

This system of competing sovereignties explicitly rejects the rule of law in Colombia. Civilians find themselves unprotected and exposed to violence and arbitrariness. Mainstream sectors of civil society understand law in Colombia in terms of military police violence. Civilians, police, and the army understand law as punishment, as a sanction rather than a system of rules. Paramilitary and guerrilla forces apply law in their own moral terms and as physical punishment. As the military regime in Guatemala and according to armed actors’ logic, enemies should be punished for what they might do in a distant future (Schirmer 1998).

The research James Holston and Teresa Caldeira (1998) have carried out in Brazil about citizenship and violence helps explain a similar understanding of law and rights in Colombia. These authors have found that law and citizenship have been principles historically shaped as distant and disadvantageous instead of being appropriated by the population to claim access to justice. In fact law has been one of the favorite realms through which Latin American elites have maintained their hegemonic supremacy. Besides an irregular and corrupt functioning of the judiciary, there is also a cultural pattern that associates order and authority with the use of violence. This pattern de-legitimizes an already discredited judicial system seen as enigmatic, closed, manipulated by the rich and used as a source of humiliation against the poor. The judiciary is rarely used to assert civil rights, which are in turn conceived as privileges. Therefore, violence as an instrument of punishment and as private and painful vengeance is used and accepted by many as a means of obtaining justice in immediate terms. The infliction of pain used by the Catholic technologies of punishment to save indigenous and black populations from irrationality has been instilled as a means of moral and social development. "It is upon the unbounded bodies of the dominated that relationships of power are structured, that meaning circulates and that the establishment of order is attempted." (Caldeira 2000:476)

In Colombia, law has been understood in terms of respect obtained by means of violence. Guerrillas affirm their need to resort to violence so that the state takes them seriously; similarly, paramilitaries say that they have to use violent techniques so that guerrillas understand that their anti-subversive mission is serious. Armed groups of men obtain authority by conquering land using violence to keep enemies out their territories. By fleeing, people are escaping such a despotic order of things.

As I have shown armed groups have emulated the state by creating parallel regimes based on the rule of violence. Civilians have lived in a situation of total vulnerability before the total absence of the rule of law and felt that instead of state protection there is an arbitrary way of governing. Internally-displaced people as most of Colombian civilians have always known that they needed to solve their needs and materialize their dreams on their own. In a way, Colombians were used to a national order of things in which the state has been always deceitful.

In the next section I propose to present the Colombian political context between 2002 and 2004. Global factors related to the consolidation of economic free trade zones in Latin America as well as Uribe administration project of reinsertion of paramilitary groups into society, seem to favor the difficult integration of this convoluted nation into a global economy.

### **Plan Colombia, FTA<sup>45</sup> and Peace Process with Paramilitaries**

Three additional processes have fueled the war over resources and accelerated the radical transformations of land and demography. First, was the famous “Plan Colombia,” an enormous US military and financial intervention to help the Colombian government in its war against drugs and against guerrilla groups. Second, came the peace dialogues with paramilitary groups or *desparamilitarización* inaugurated by Uribe’s government with the US government endorsement. Finally, the Free Trade Agreement between the US government and Colombia, Ecuador and Peru was signed in 2005.

What originally was conceived as a military assistance to attack drug-production related activities and to seize guerrilla-controlled territory became in mid 2002 under Bush

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<sup>45</sup> Free Trade Agreement signed between the US government and Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in 2005.

administration part of Bush's war against terrorism. The goals of Plan Colombia were stated in the US Embassy fact sheet of March 23, 2000 as follows:

The proposed U.S. assistance package will help Colombia address the breadth of the challenges it faces, its efforts to fight illicit drug trade, to increase the rule of law, to protect human rights, to expand economic development, to institute judicial reform, and to foster peace.

Under the Clinton administration, \$ 7.5 billions had been approved and during the Bush administration, an average of \$ 700 million per year has been allocated in military aid. The so-called "Patriot Plan" (*Plan Patriota*) was one of the military actions through which Uribe announced his determination to destroy guerrilla groups. Surprisingly, the aid package did not include the paramilitary threat. Wola's study (2004) has demonstrated the failure of this continued allocation of resources to reduce drug trafficking. The production of coca paste and cocaine exported illegally to the US has not decreased. Aerial spraying of herbicides on coca fields has not reduced global production of drugs but instead has pushed families off their land, threatened local communities' health, environment and manual-eradication-alternative-development programs. Coca cultivators keep relocating and cultivating in new ways elsewhere.

Since May 2004, Colombia has also participated in negotiations towards a free-trade agreement with the United States that supposedly includes the elimination of commercial protections over national products, services and investments from both nations. Urged by the pharmaceutical, entertainment, cosmetic and biotechnology industries, the US seeks to protect its intellectual property rights beyond international standards. Experts have called into question the US interest in natural resources located in tropical natural reserves and especially their biological and cultural diversity. The idea of the free-trade agreement is to break up the legal barriers that impede efforts to patent animals, plants, and any genetic

information from these environmental ecosystems. The UN has estimated the benefits from the use of the tropical diversity from multinational corporations that patent resources up to \$4.500 millions each year (*El Espectador*, 6-12 March 2005:1B). Amazon countries will become the new exporting countries of genetic resources and native botanical and medical knowledge. The forests of Chocó where most forced Afro-Colombian displaced come from harbors four hundred vegetal species, eight hundred vertebrates, 69% of fishing reserves, 43% of timber, 82% of platinum, 18% of gold, 14% of silver of the totals of these natural resources in Colombia (Gómez 2002); these figures demonstrate why business interests see Chocó a big laboratory of biodiversity and potential products.

After the failure of the peace talks between the Pastrana government and the guerrilla group FARC in 1999, Uribe was elected as a “patriarchal redeemer.” Rich and poor sectors believe he embodies the hard-line hand they have been long waiting to recover their dignity, image and honor. For Uribe’s government, war is a necessary evil legitimated by its slogan of “democratic security.”

According to all predictions, Uribe initiated a peace process through the demobilization of approximately 4,000 paramilitaries. The AUC paramilitary groups see themselves as heroes and patriots knowing how to respond to the guerrilla attacks and having brought security where the state has failed to do so: they say “we have substituted for the state, satisfying the population’s needs. The government does not have the credibility nor the legitimacy that we do have among these people” (Arnson 2005:11). On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, the paramilitary forces were scheduled to begin gathering within a designated 142 square miles called Santafé de Ralito in the Northwestern department of Córdoba as a condition to initiate their conversations with the government (see figure 4). They expressed their commitment to



a complete demobilization by December 2005 and their contribution to a country “without drug-trafficking” (Arnson 2005:10). That day the Colombian government declared that any pending arrest warrants would be suspended for at least six months and no extradition request would be processed (Wola 2004:1). Paramilitary leaders have previously stated publicly their refusal to spend any time in jail and that the removal of any threat of extradition to the United States as a condition of keeping their dialogues going with the government.

This entire peace process has raised serious ethical concerns. The AUC are considered responsible for the worst atrocities committed during the last ten years of war and most of their leaders are under U.S. indictment for drug trafficking. There are reports that big drug lords have even bought their membership to the AUC paramilitary groups in order to receive the benefits related to the peace agreement with the government (Arnson 2005:14). Despite the symbolic ceremonies of reinsertion and the surrender of arms, this peace process does not have any legal framework in place to ensure the investigation, processing and punishment of the AUC leaders for their crimes (Wola 2004:1). This means that there is no guarantee that the demobilized groups will stop their illegal activities and killings for hire, since the government reinsertion programs in place to date are of very short duration and do not provide adequate alternative livelihoods. Paramilitary economic activities would remain untouched as well as their political control over towns and districts where they usually impose their own electoral candidates. They already exert a considerable influence over some institutions such as the army, the police, and the Attorney General’s office (*New York Times*, May 19, 2003:A10). So there is no independent, impartial institution or tribunal to investigate the paramilitary-related crimes and massacres.

The bill introduced by the Uribe administration during the fall of 2003 established a legal framework for this demobilization and reinsertion of paramilitaries called the “Alternative Penal Law.” It was submitted to the Colombian congress but did not meet any of the government’s legal obligations to ensure truth, justice, and reparations for victims of paramilitary atrocities. Therefore, it was pulled from consideration. Instead of perpetrators’ full confessions of their crimes, accused people would “collaborate” and “cooperate” with justice (*El Tiempo* February 23, 2005:1-2). First, this bill did not make any distinction between war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ordinary crimes contradicting the International Humanitarian Law as well as the Inter-American Humanitarian Law. Second, sanctions contemplated in the law project are not proportional to the crimes committed. This means that all the accusations against an individual would be part of one single judicial process that would not exceed a punishment of ten years. As a result, this law would legalize paramilitary impunity for the violations of human rights and does very little to penalize them. There is also no security strategy to prevent the FARC from returning to the rural areas left by demobilized paramilitaries or to protect the communities that in those areas could be victims of retaliations by the guerrilla groups. Nevertheless, in February 2005 the government amidst big divisions within the congress managed to approve a legal project called “Justice and Peace.” It included punishments of less than five years and gave the president the power to ask for a suspension of punishment for those who committed crimes against humanity but were engaged with the peace process.

The three processes above demonstrate a historical crucial period that has reshaped Colombian topography. Paramilitary groups are responsible for most of the horrendous crimes and forced displacements and have proven links with the drug lords of the most

profitable international business. Colombia is the largest exporting country of cocaine and its government is signing a free trade agreement with the US that seems to be not very favorable for the meager legal production of goods and agricultural products that it will promote.

Guerrilla groups, perceived worldwide as an anachronism, defend patriotic national principles of sovereignty while the state is following the global mandates of democracy, free-trade, and war against terrorism that the US government has recently presented as inevitable and desirable for humankind. In next section I characterize the different regions where people have been evicted to show that these are wealthy and strategic regions.

### **Geo-warfare**

The techniques of displacement that armed groups employ are linked to the strategic use of territories and its geography. Death threats, massacres, forced recruitment, temporary take-overs, and selective killings constitute the wide range of strategies to gain the dominion over a territory. In the so-called “areas of expulsion” the logics of mobility that internally-displaced resort to are also multiple: an indefinite exit; leaving the area for only some period of the year, and returning for the time of sowing and harvest, fleeing to demand the right to return afterwards, as did the Cacarica community and the Peace communities from Urabá; or leaving the area definitely and forgetting little by little the possibility of return (Osorio 2003). Some communities have declared themselves “peace communities,” refusing to leave and stay where they have lived even though the armed groups remain besieging their town.

Luis Eduardo Pérez (2002) has found out that the areas affected by forced displacement are: areas of capital expansion with big investment projects; areas with illegal crops; oil, coal and gold extraction areas. Similarly, Gonzalez (et.al 2003) research team

shows how at the very core of this armed conflict resides a territorial dispute over geographical corridors used for drug-trafficking, arm-trafficking, oil, agriculture, and livestock industries. CODHES (2004) states that the map of forced displacement coincides with the map where macro-plans have been formulated and that I locate in figure 2: inter-ocean channel Atrato-Truandó in the Urabá region; roads connecting the Pacific Ocean with Medellín and Pereira; Ituangó hydroelectric plant in the Paramillo knot area; extension of the Carretera Marginal de la Selva or Interamerican Highway that will connect the Amazon region of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.

As a dispute over wealthy and strategic lands, forced displacement is a demographic reordering of populations. This geo-politics and geo-war consists of emptying lands of allies of the guerrilla groups and repopulating them with new workers hired by paramilitary groups. What takes place is a redistribution of land tenure and labor on a vast scale. The economy of war has thus produced a new political geography in Colombia.

I will characterize each of the power-switching areas in which paramilitaries have gained control over former guerrilla territories in order to explain the logics of this geo-warfare. I elaborated a map of war (see figure 3) in which I present the areas of expulsion with highest levels of political violence based on the information gathered by Fernán Gonzalez and his research team (2003) as well as on maps displaying population- expelling municipalities from 2000-2002 made by the RSS. Based on Amnesty International's reports I identify eight areas (see figure 4) that correspond to strategic corridors that armed actors are disputing along the main pipelines of the country and in areas where the presence of illegal crops and other extractive resources like oil and palm oil are important (see figure 2). It is there that displacement has had its utmost impact.

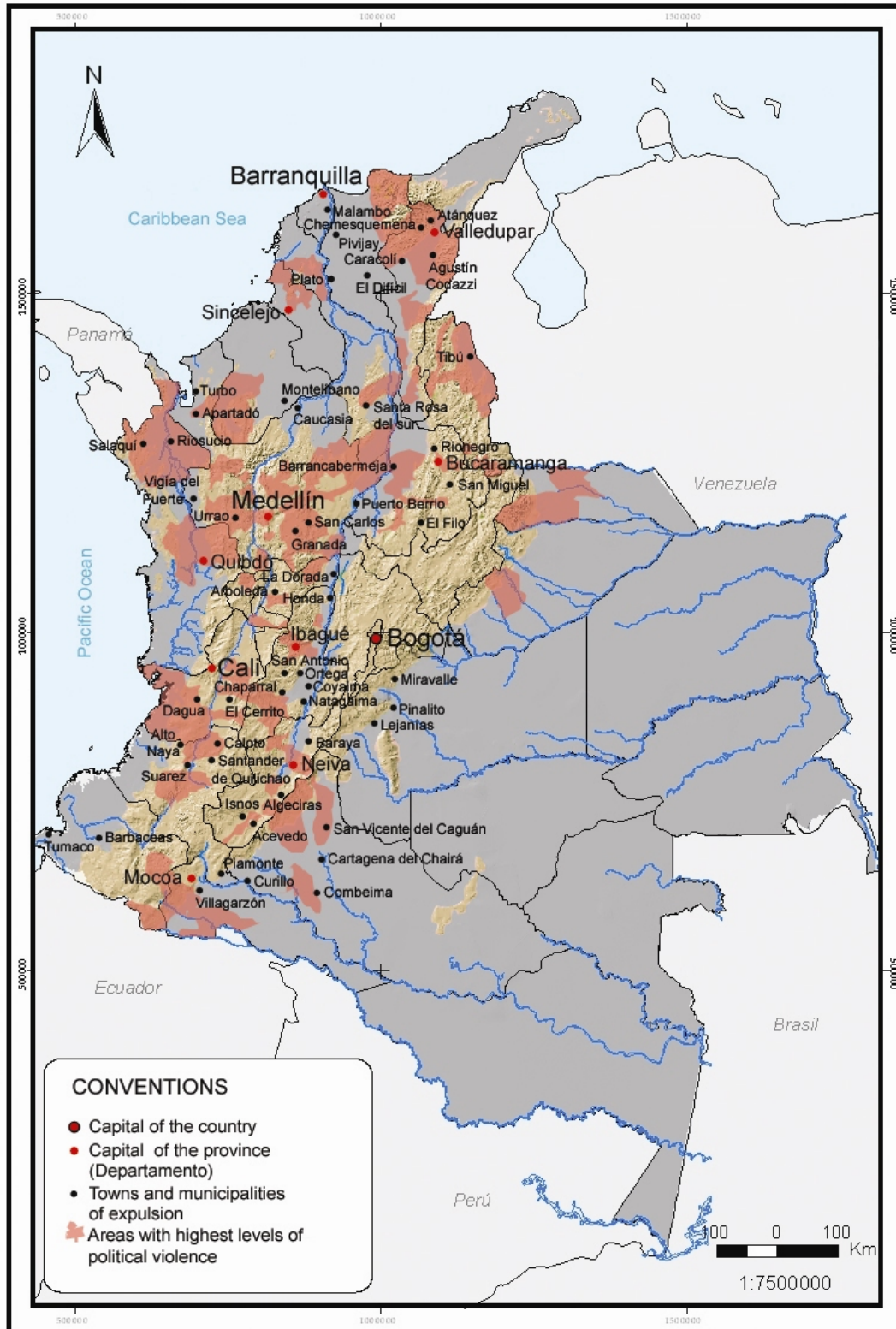


Figure 3: Municipalities from where my interviewees were evicted

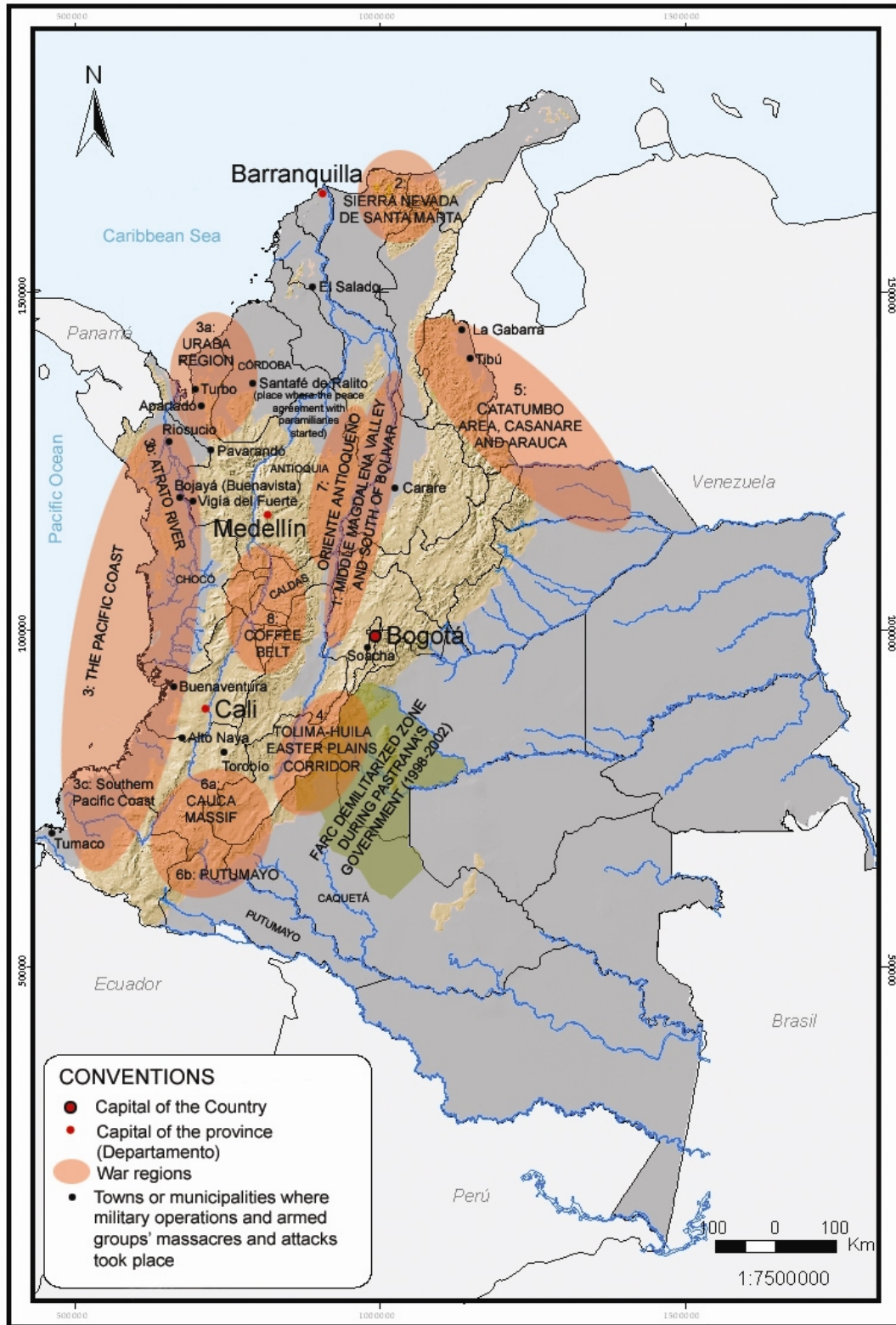


Figure 4: Map of War Regions

1) *Middle Magdalena Valley and South of Bolivar*: located in the center of Colombia between the Magdalena River and the Caribbean Coast. This region harbors the country's largest oil refinery, and copper and gold mines; it provides an easy drug-transit route to different areas of the country. Jungle and mountains bordering the Magdalena River are used for the planting of coca crops. Pablo Escobar's cartel headquarters were located in this area. Armed groups use the hills to hide, and they profit from extortion, kidnappings, and participation in black market for stolen oil. The Middle Magdalena (Magdalena Medio) is, literally, the "laboratory of a paramilitary strategy" aimed at destroying strong social movements and worker unions such as the ATCC<sup>46</sup> and the OFP (Women's People's organization). Today the paramilitaries control virtually all the town centers of the area. Paramilitaries and the FARC guerrillas have perpetrated massacres after massacres in this zone. In 2000, the paramilitaries executed 36 people from the town called El Salado accused of helping left-wing guerrillas. Something similar took place in January 28, 2001 in Chengue, Sucre when they killed 26 men (See figure 4).

2) *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*: declared as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO, it is the world's highest coastal isolated system of mountains standing apart from the Andes chain. Kogi, Aruaco, Wiwa and Kankuamo indigenous communities that inhabit the highest areas of the Sierra consider that their habitat is the heart of the world and the place where humankind originated. This worldview is the basis for their commitment and struggles for the conservation of this unique ecosystem. Central Andean *colonos* fleeing from the Violence of 1950s and 1960s resettled in the middle areas, clearing of forest and drying of hundreds of rivers that feed the low plains of the Caribbean. Paramilitary groups are located in the low

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<sup>46</sup> Asociación de trabajadores Campesinos del Carare, Association of Worker Peasants of Carare

lands and foothills of the sierra and guerrilla groups in the highlands. It constitutes a perfect natural refuge for armed groups that hide up in the hills and undertake sporadic armed actions in the low plains. Indigenous communities and *colonos* are trapped in this cross-fire. The Sierra Nevada was well known for the cultivation of marihuana during the 1970s. Since 1990s it has become the site of extensive coca crops. Three armed groups (the FARC, the EPL, and the ELN) entered the area in the 1980s. Later in the 1990s two blocs of paramilitary groups arrived and settled their military bases in the eastern lower part of the region. Since 2001, paramilitaries have killed unionists, teachers and, very recently, indigenous leaders from the Kankuamo ethnic group.

3) *The Pacific Coast Region*: it is a vast rainforest area 900 km long and 50-180 km wide stretching from Panama to Ecuador and between the Western chain of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean noted for its heavy rainfall and its remarkable biological diversity. 90% of its population is from Afro-Colombian descent and 5% from various indigenous groups (Kuna, Emberá and Emberá-Chamí groups). It is among the areas of richest biological diversity in the world.

a) Within the Pacific region, the *Urabá region* on the border with Panama has been the most violent area in Colombia and simultaneously the most strategic region. With a double exit to the sea (to the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea) it is used as a corridor for illegal commerce in drugs, arms and contraband. It is also a corridor to reach the central and former prosperous coffee areas of Antioquia and Caldas. The mountain system called the Paramillo knot has been used as a refuge for armed groups and the growing of coca and poppy crops. It has also been a national and international agro-industrial area of banana production,



extensive cattle-ranching and timber extraction. Paramilitary groups have forged alliances with wealthy landowners and drug barons in return for protection against guerrillas. During the 1980s it was a guerrilla stronghold but was taken over by paramilitary groups since 1994. The peace process of 1990 with the EPL was a total failure in the region since people who surrendered their arms and joined the UP party and the Communist Party were persecuted or killed. In March 1997, displaced people who took up residence in abandoned homes of San José de Apartadó stood up against paramilitary groups who intended to take over the town and declared themselves a “Peace Community.” They collectively decided not to carry arms and reject the actions of any armed groups. In February 2005, though, the founder of this Peace Community and five more people were massacred. The government of president Uribe sent the army arguing that there couldn’t be any territory in Colombia impeding the presence of the armed forces. The government has subsequently accused them of having ties with the guerrillas.

b) *The Atrato River* crosses the forest of Chocó from north to south. It was apparently at the margins of conflict until 1996. The FARC guerrilla group had never used this area for military actions; instead it used it to rest and profit from the entry of arms and the exit of drugs through the Panamanian border. In February 1997, the Colombian army’s Operation Genesis intended to destroy a guerrilla stronghold and bombed the region of Riosucio, forcing 15,000 and 17,000 people to flee to Turbo (where they resettled in a stadium) Pavarandó (where they stay in a refugee camp) and the forest of Darién after they crossed the border with Panamá. Later paramilitaries unleashed the worst massacres in Colombian history: in May 2002, a battle between paramilitary and guerrilla forces took place in Bellavista and Vigía del Fuerte. A FARC mortar round landed on the church of Bellavista

and killed 119 people and caused the displacement of 4,248 people. Today there are guerrilla, paramilitary and army checkpoints along the Atrato River blocking the main fluvial route of the area and provoking food blockages. The black and indigenous communities here also are trapped and cannot move. “Peace communities” and political organizations that want to return under international protection have organized and created new settlements of peace like CAVIDA<sup>47</sup>. They have been threatened several times by paramilitaries, though.

Companies owning plantations of oil palms have cut down vast areas of forest and claim to be the new owners of the former owners’ small plots of land.

c) In the southern parts of the Pacific, especially in the ports of Buenaventura and Tumaco, paramilitary groups control urban areas through the killing of very young people allegedly linked to human rights defenders and members of social movements. Private Companies are cutting down vast areas of the forest in nearby Tumaco and replacing them with oil palms.

4) *Tolima-Huila- eastern plains corridor*: located in the central Andean Chain of mountains very close to Bogotá, it is used as a strategic connection point between central Andean cities and the plains of the Amazon basin where the FARC has always had its strongest political influence since 1964. It has been a traditional area of rural resettlement of migrants coming from the central Andean region. FARC requested the de-militarization of the area as a precondition for negotiations with the Pastrana administration in 1998, and it remained in existence as “de-militarized zone” until the collapse of peace talks in 20 February 2002 (see figure 4). The subsequent bombings mark the start of the military’s efforts to retake the demilitarized zone, leading to the loss of civilian lives, various waves of displacement and

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<sup>47</sup> Comunidades de Autodeterminación, Vida y Dignidad del Cacarica, Communities of self-determination, life and dignity of Cacarica

significant damage to property. Since then, security forces have labeled civilians as guerrilla sympathizers. The guerrillas have left the urban areas and dispersed around the region whereas paramilitaries now have a strong and public presence in the southern urban zones of the province of Caquetá. Both armed groups recruit civilians to cultivate poppy crops and latex to produce heroin. The main victims of killings have been the mayors of the municipalities.

5) *Catatumbo area, Casanare and Arauca*: on the border with Venezuela this area is located between Andean foothills facing the huge Amazon south-eastern plain. The largest oil pipeline in the country (Caño Limón-Coveñas) is located there (see figure 2). The strategy of the ELN guerrilla group, which entered the region to oppose Occidental Petroleum's oil exploration, consists since 1984 of blowing up the pipeline and electric towers and other infrastructure. Both guerrilla groups, FARC and ELN, have imposed "war taxes" on national contractors working for oil foreign firms and kidnapped oil workers. They have threatened local state representatives (mayors and councilors). They have also carried out attacks on military targets using low-precision bombs and mortars that have often resulted in civilian deaths. On the other hand, paramilitaries have targeted union activists, journalists, teachers and health workers. Unlike the regions described above, this area attracts most of the Colombian army's security operations. Security forces monitor and use paramilitary proxies to threaten and harass communities living near the oil pipeline. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999 the paramilitaries killed 150 people in the area called Tibú in more than a dozen attacks. Five years later, in June, 2004 FARC guerrilla groups entered a farm in the same municipality and killed 34 peasant farmers working on a farm harvesting coca leaf.

6) *Cauca massif*:

a) Cauca region marks the beginning of Colombia's triple range of Andean mountains that connect it to the Southern Amazon basin bordering Ecuador. This area has the largest indigenous population. Various Indigenous groups of this region (Nasa, Inga, Guambiano) have created the most vigorous and oldest indigenous rights movement: the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca. These movements have responded to armed conflict by peacefully exercising their right to protect their territory and autonomy. They have publicly and thoroughly repudiated any armed action arguing that violence erodes their well-being. They created "communities in resistance" claiming their political and cultural rights based on the strengthening of their autonomy. The Nasa project created in 1980 in the municipality of Toribío is a cultural and economic plan based on sustainable agriculture and conservation, traditional education and health programs, and family assistance. During the Holy Week of 2001, paramilitaries besieged the town of Alto Naya and murdered 130 unarmed indigenous civilians using guns, machetes, and chain saws. After this horrendous event, the Cauca indigenous leaders decided to create the Indigenous Guard figure discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. This is a nonviolent organized group of community members who act as peace mediators when there is an intrusion of armed factions into their communities.

b) The *Putumayo* area along the borders with Ecuador and Perú has oil pipelines that interconnect. FARC guerrillas have targeted many times this oil infrastructure and threatened refineries and business people. This has maintained oil extraction at a small scale. The paramilitaries arrived in Putumayo in the late 1990's. They have seized most of the department's main towns. It is also the largest coca-producing area in Colombia (see figure

2). Plan Colombia's several rounds of aerial fumigation have been conducted there since 2001. These aerial sprayings have destroyed thousands of hectares of food crops and pasture and caused massive exodus and health problems among Putumayo's population.

7) *Oriente Antioqueño*: the north-east of the city of Medellín forms a wealthy industrial development area. By controlling the city of Medellín, the armed groups have important access routes to the city. The west of the city is the focus of major road developments, while the north-east provides access to Medellín's industrial hinterland called *Oriente Antioqueño*. During 1980's and 1990's, ELN and FARC guerrillas created militias recruiting teens and children in the poorest areas of the city called *comunas*. They carried out "social cleansing" actions which are operations against petty criminals, drug addicts and members of criminal gangs. During the 1990's the Medellín drug cartel has provoked an incredibly violent armed confrontation taking place between guerrilla militias and newly financed paramilitary gangs within the city of Medellín. By 2003 paramilitaries were present in many of the poor Medellín neighborhoods. They claim to have contributed to the lowering of the crime by 40% percent.

8) *Coffee belt*: located in the central Andean chain south and west of the city of Medellín drug-traffickers from the Cali Cartel have bought lands and built tourist complexes in this formerly prosperous coffee area. The boom of the coffee crops in the 1960s and 1970s has been replaced by coca crops and pastures for cattle ranches that cover the hillsides of this region. The owners of the farms have abandoned their properties or rent them out. There, FARC guerrilla group has operated especially through road-blocks, kidnappings and the assassination of indigenous leaders and teachers.

Approximately 40.000 refugees have crossed the borders of Panamá, Venezuela, Perú and Brazil and become refugees. Most of them (30,000) crossed the border with Ecuador to flee the aerial spraying of Plan Colombia and the threats of armed groups. The flow of Colombian refugees to the town of Sucumbíos has disturbed the local population who feel ignored as the Colombians receive help and the Ecuadorians continue to live in extreme poverty. Refugees cannot work in Ecuador until their asylum claims get processed.

The Venezuelan government has denied access to Colombian refugees and blocked UNHCR access to them. Refugees who fled the Tibú massacre and crossed the border with Venezuela, for instance, have been intimidated and forced to return to Colombia. Similarly, the Panamanian government has repatriated people fleeing from paramilitary killings in the north of Chocó. Panamanian police patrols the border to prevent the spillover of the Colombian conflict. Colombian refugees are subjected to curfews and restrictions employed for “security reasons.” They are given a temporary protected status valid for two months renewable if the Panamanian state considers that the situation is still unsafe for a return.

This map of the conflict shows that Colombia’s social and natural landscape has totally changed since 1995. There is now an organized paramilitary project to exterminate social activism and social movements’ claims labeling political leaders, members of community organizations, public functionaries (teachers, health workers), labor unionists, and defenders of human rights as sympathizers of guerrilla groups. It also shows how armed groups dispossess former migrants who usually have settled in small plots of lands, in order to prepare the land for cattle ranching, oil palm industry or illegal crops.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that long disputes over lands that have been taking place in Colombia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century correspond to a situation of competing sovereignties. The use of private armies to defend lands that represent wealth, status and political power, have also been part of a worshipping for an imagined fatherland where armed groups have thought an alternative social order is possible. Forced displacement has been used to expropriate and accumulate lands, and extract their resources in the face of an ineffective official, legal land-tenure system. For lack of a prevailing sovereignty by the Colombian state, forced displacement has been recently used by insurgent groups as well as paramilitary forces allied with regional elites as a geo-war tactic supporting an economic control over global illegal markets (drug-trafficking and arm trafficking) and to protect the extraction of timber, oil, banana, and palm-oil.

Historically, wide rural sectors of Colombian populations have been expelled, removed, and hired again and again as migrant workers. In this constant flux of imposed and voluntary movements, migrants have been able to live, build and rebuild in various places at the margins of the Colombian state. What today international humanitarian discourse calls internal forced displacement was previously known as migrations from rural to urban places, enlargement of the peripheries of the cities, and colonization of so-called “rural distant” places. This explains why, in the case of internal forced displacement, people so often long for an imagined land of before in which they have invested dreams, community efforts and political struggle. As I will discuss in chapter 5, instead of a unidirectional movement described as a sudden arrival from the countryside to the cities, internally displaced people

have a dense family, community organization and social movements throughout the country that they rely on to resettle and start a new life story.



## Chapter 2

### Mobility, Victimhood and Place

In the first part of this chapter, I contrast the literature on migration and the literature on forced displacement and refugees to demonstrate how blurred the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary population fluxes can be. I argue that forced displacement is not only a violent event or a definite disconnection from places but a process that link populations on the move, communities that stayed behind and the new web of networks that internally-displaced people establish along their journeys. Unlike migration, forced displacement is a process that involves violence and fear. However, like migratory moves, forced displacement entails social change processes linking former places of residence, home communities and new places of residence.

Literature and agencies dealing with forced displacement tend to see it as a traumatic event with pathological effects. First, I discuss the international humanitarian legal framework through which humanitarian assistance is provided and on which impoverished communities around the world have come to depend. I demonstrate that IGOs and humanitarian agencies use a functionalist approach to see internally displaced as victims in need of help and become new agents of development and modernity. I use a critical reading of Colombian state programs of assistance to illustrate how they tend to see internally displaced people as evacuees in need of becoming modern instead of people who should be granted indemnity as stated in law 387, 1997.

My interviewees oppose these humanitarian assumptions that freeze them as victims, culture-less or disabled people. Using the material of my interviews, I illustrate people's

resourcefulness and the use of multiple cultural repertoires to argue that forced displacement is traumatic but not a fixed reality in displaced people's lives. It is nonetheless a structural mark and a point of division in people's life stories. People feel that armed actors and violence have taken away planned dreams and projects. However, the trauma of forced displacement is usually followed by the restructuring of life.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze how scholars, experts, and institutions usually see refugees as situated in a liminal passage, disoriented and temporarily deprived of cultural competences needed to operate adequately in the new context in which they resettle. The argument of lack of place unintentionally reinforces commonly held discriminatory discourses that perceive uprootedness as an anomaly or pathology (Malkki 1995). Similarly, in situations of forced mobility, the notions of "place of origin" and "place of reception" are discussed as the main sources of internally displaced people's identity. The literature on displacement as well as interviewees refer to the places of origin and places of reception using dichotomies urban/rural, backward/modern that are used to situate people in fixed dual categories and locations. I propose to think critically this discourse around places and argue that practices of discrimination towards internally displaced people are related to a categorical thinking based on unilineal and evolutionist schemes that classify people and places.

### **Forced Displacement and Migration**

The study of forced displacement and mobility constitutes a theoretical challenge for disciplines like sociology and anthropology. Although there have been recent attempts to provide theoretical grounding for this field of study (Brettell and Hollifield 2000) there is a

lack of anthropological debates in relation to mobility and especially imposed movements of people that have increased throughout the world during the post Cold-War era. A huge literature on international migration and transnationalism contrasts with a meager one on internal forced displacement. I would then like to ask: What are the differences and similarities between the experiences of internally displaced people, refugees, exiles, and regular migrants? How is the literature on forced internal displacement different from that of migration studies? How have these fields of study depicted forced migrants and voluntary migrants?

Western history has provided several examples of mass displacements of people: during the Atlantic slave trade from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the biggest mass forced displacements in history, thousands of slaves were purchased per year in West Africa to supply a huge demand for labor for farming and mining in the European colonial economies in the Americas. Voluntary migrations have also been used to consolidate, and expand the political power of empires. They have even had a crucial role in the building of nation-states and have forged the processes of urbanization. Migrations have been promoted to supply mass labor force to build cities, railroads, dams, and bridges (Chinese and Japanese workers built railroads in Perú and California in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). In other words, migrations and forced displacements have long been part of state-sponsored programs and technologies of power (Escobar 2004).

From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a vast number of European migrants resettled and reshaped the territorial and cultural domains of the Americas. Millions of people fled poverty in Europe and were key actors in modernizing Latin- American economies and policies. In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural-urban migrations were used as part of the

modernization programs that reshaped Latin American societies. Today, immigrants from poor countries go to Europe, North America, oil countries of the Middle East, and Asia, where they are not always welcomed. They do so to escape poverty, violence and the dismantling of welfare states. But they also migrate voluntarily trying to maximize their economic opportunities through their ties in different places of the globe while providing a qualified cheap labor force.

Being aware of a constant mobility of populations today, I would like to ask what kinds of population movements are ‘voluntary’, which are imposed and under what circumstances are they forced. We are not dealing in this work with people who are free to move but with displacement as an imposed situation. It is therefore useful to spell out the differences and similarities between migration and forced displacement.

It is commonly assumed that the main difference between forcefully displaced people and voluntary migrants is that migrants’ mobility is voluntary. However, people also migrate because of poverty, droughts, and lack of opportunities. Although migrations have been discussed as planned moves usually driven by a dream of a better life elsewhere, they also include moves to avoid constraining economic and political circumstances for future generations. Migration has been seen as a ‘travel’ experience, calculated and assessed (Friedlander 1965, Brown and Neuberger 1977), but it is in fact a very complex practice aimed at seeking a radical change in one’s life in terms of what is commonly viewed as the pursuit of success and happiness.

In the case of migration, people desire to be away from their places of residence whereas internally forced displaced are forced to move. Internally-displaced people cannot plan and, most of the time, do not have time for anything but escaping. People’s choices are

severely constrained. The case of armed-conflict-induced-displacement is an involuntary mobility imposed by armed groups that appropriate a place or territory and expel those who do not comply with their despotic regimes.

But how do we trace the line between voluntary and involuntary movements? Are massive movements of people fleeing hunger ‘voluntary’? Are economic reasons such as poverty and deprivation of opportunities ‘voluntary’? Can we call the moves of scared families that haven’t been threatened directly ‘forced’ displacements? Most domestic and international laws do not consider “economic variables” such as economic disparities, wage differentials, poverty, and lack of opportunities as legitimate reasons for assistance. And, yet, economic reforms and programs may disrupt people’s economic activities and access to jobs. Only in specific big cases such as human-made environmental disasters like the Bhopal gas explosion in 1984 or the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 (Petryna 2005) techno-political apparatuses including the creation of a scientific domain have been created to provide assistance to internally displaced people.

Zolberg (et.al.1989) proposes that violence is the most reasonable parameter to distinguish voluntary migration from forced migration. Political and religious persecution accompanied by violation of human rights form part of these forced massive displacements in which refugees are defined as persons caught in violent events in which they do not participate willingly. Those who can prove a well-founded fear of being persecuted are eligible to apply for the category of refugees, for instance.

Functionalist approaches see economic migration as a unidirectional movement from one “expulsion place” (the place of origin) to a reception place (the place of arrival); an internal push-out due to stagnation at “home,” and an external pull-up from the promise of

greater opportunities “elsewhere.” This literature views migrations as dual movements from the countryside to the cities and from poor countries to rich countries. I will discuss later how the notions of “place of origin” and “places of reception” need to be problematized.

I propose to see migrations as well as forced displacements as movements that encompass people’s former experiences of construction and engagement with the places in which they have lived, their memories of social spaces and entourages, and the projects of transformation in terms of life trajectory and plans of social mobility for future generations. What’s interesting is that migrants as well as forcibly displaced people are agents of constant change as well as weavers of new ties between the different communities with which they interact: through their savings, remittances, remembrances, and new political engagements they affect the economic situation and expectations of their home communities. Through their new social relations, they stimulate the mobility of new migrants from their families or their communities.

Like voluntary migrants, displaced people who resettle in Bogotá keep connections with their home-towns, sending remittances and becoming important actors for the people who stayed back home. They are not only more effective in their political struggles in the city but they also find new ways to negotiate social positions, prestige, and power through the accumulation of newly-acquired symbolic forms of capital (education, possibility of being closer to the central state power). Being out of war-torn areas makes them key figures for those who stayed behind. Some of them want to stay only temporarily in Bogotá until they find a way to move again. It is valid, then, to ask if forced displacement as well as migration reinforce hegemonic assumptions about the naturalized tendency of populations to move towards “better futures found in more developed areas” or if these moves are acts of

courage and agency by those who want to better their lives by leaving a troubled and dangerous environment.

Displacements as well as migrations are made of multiple movements including initial resettlements in small and middle size cities, previous moves from urban to rural areas and from rural to urban ones, subsequent migration movements, periodical trips back home, constant shipping of remittances and news both ways. I argue that forced migration usually transmutes into other forms of mobility such as social mobility and even international migration (Van Hear 2002). Forced displacement movements, like migrations, are not absolutely random. People flee to where they can find *paisanos*, family kin, political networks of support, and work.

Those who stay in their home town support those who go elsewhere and those already gone may help newcomers. Communities in the cities are essential bases of support for those who stay facing war. Inversely, the community back home constitutes the reason to keep the fight going and the option of returning. An exchange of information, remittances, and news constitute a two-way cultural exchange between home and the new place of resettlement. Marta Abello (2004) found that women from Boraudó organized with other people from other towns of the province of Chocó, located in the forest of the Pacific, to pay a bus that in December goes from Bogotá to Quibdó fully-packed with remittances. They do not only send clothes, shoes, money to pay the *puestos* (payment of their family members' funerals) but also the umbilical cords of children who were born in Bogotá so that they can be buried under the appropriate tree, according to the tradition.

Structural political approaches have stated that people become spatially mobile because of interregional differentials in wages and employment opportunities (Todaro 1969,

Borjas 1989). Similarly, structural-historical approaches grounded in the analysis of the global political economy situate the migration process in the context of the global capitalist system (Portes and Walton 1981). The position of some peripheral and dependent areas within the global economy leads to economic dislocations and a traffic of labor going towards the central areas. Disadvantaged populations constitute “a reserve army for cheap labor” in enclaves of growth within the underdeveloped nations as well as at the core of the developed ones (George 1990, Sassen 1999). The use of this center-periphery model and its economic determinism is useful to understand that migration is not only a matter of free-choice movement between places but consists also of differentiated and selective population flows that supply specific markets and economic activities (Sassen 1999). Internal forced displacement is closely intertwined with labor migration mainly because, after being expelled, many people keep moving in search of better opportunities in the job market, as my interviews show. Structural factors such as differentials of salaries and opportunities are also factors taken into account by internally displaced people, not necessarily immediately after the violent events but later as they manage to find strategies to survive.

Newcomers try their best to use the advantages of settling down in places where their relatives live and work rather than in places where rejection or hostile behaviors are more likely to affect them. As in any migratory movement, the first internally displaced people stimulate other members of the family to follow them producing subsequent chain- migratory movements.

Theories on migration have considered at length impersonal and mechanistic structural economic and political factors such as the expansion of markets within a global political hierarchy (Massey 1998) as some of the main causes for migrants’ mobility. In



contrast, most of the literature on international refugees tends to avoid that discussion presenting the causes of forced displacement as uncontrollable and inevitable factors: war, economic change, political upheaval, natural and human-made disasters. I propose to conceive of forced displacement not only as a conscious personal decision to flee violence, but also as a technology of power linked to global factors that often determine the various directions of displaced people's moves, as I have discussed in chapter 1. The global war on drugs, the war on terrorism and neo-liberal reforms are deeply implicated in the ways in which populations are removed from certain areas to others. For example, aerial fumigation of coca fields which are part of the Plan Colombia in the Province of Putumayo has pushed many families off their lands. Similarly, the expansion of cattle-ranching farms and the newly created oil and palm extraction companies have become the new hiring agents of cheap labor force in many rural areas of conflict on the Pacific coast.

Unlike migration, forced displacement in its first stages consists of escaping violent events and persecutions that in the case of Colombia are part of a long history of violence aggravated by global factors. In the case of migratory movements, people may also leave undesirable political and economic circumstances, but their decision is taken voluntary and with previous planning. Forced displacement is a radical unplanned and traumatic rupture in people's lives, but it does not imply total disconnection from places of previous residence. Although forced displacement can be interpreted as a radical fall in terms of social standing, internally displaced people build networking and political strategies similar to the ones voluntary migrants use to compensate loss and mourning. If migrants seek an intentional and radical change driven by expectations of a better life in terms of status and economic

improvement, the internally-displaced people do so because they are abruptly removed and need to find the means to cope with unplanned radical changes.

In the next section I will focus critically on the humanitarian and psycho-social approaches that have set the international and national standards for dealing with forced internal displacement and the widely held notions around displacement and displaced people. I explain how international agencies operate as new technical emissaries of modernity and development and how the Colombian government has interpreted forced displacement as a natural tragedy tied to poverty instead of a matter of human rights violation. In my interviews I find that people oppose the victimization that has predominated in the discourse of tragic poverty and talk about forced displacement in a more complex way.

### **Humanitarian Discourses**

Using a very technical and neutral language, international law defines “Internally displaced people” as people who flee within the borders of their own countries due to armed conflict, internal strife, human-made disaster, or systematic violations of human rights. The 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees (1951) called them “refugees within national borders.” The 1967 UNHCR protocol protects refugees but not internally displaced people. This agency defines refugees as the persons who “by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution are outside the country of their nationality and by reason of such fear are unwilling to return to that country” (Richmond 1992:348). In other words, the international community has a well-established legal and institutional system of protection and assistance for refugees who cross into other countries, but it lacks such systems for those trapped within

borders of their countries. Therefore, internally displaced people, remain under state sovereignty.

Francis Deng (1998:14) redefined the 1992 UN working definition of internally displaced people because it does not differentiate between the persons who flee their homes in an unnoticed way and people who are expelled by blatant acts of force and violence. However, his definition still keeps together political violence, human-made and natural disasters as if these three types of events were the same:

Internally displaced people include persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

In 2003, the UNHCR released its “Guiding principles on Internal Displacement.” These principles cannot be legally enforced yet, but they set international standards to open government and rebel groups’ conduct to public scrutiny. The guiding principles set forth the rights of internally displaced people and the obligations of governments *vis-à-vis* displaced populations in all phases of displacement. They establish an explicit right for any person not to be arbitrarily displaced. They affirm the right of internally displaced people to request international humanitarian assistance, the right of international actors to offer such assistance, and the duty of states to accept such offers. They provide explicit guarantees against the forced return of internally displaced people to places where their safety is not assured, and they provide compensation for property lost during displacement (Cohen and Deng 1998:3-7)

However, the UNHCR cannot interfere in any Colombian government’s decisions regarding internally displaced people. Based on principles of neutrality, the UNHCR is

limited to promoting the concept of “sovereignty as responsibility,” which means reminding the Colombian state from time to time that internally displaced people are its responsibility and that it should provide its citizens with protection and life-supporting assistance.

The UNHCR argues it has a paramount role assisting the safe passage of civilians through front lines, relocating and evacuating civilians from conflict areas, assisting besieged people unable or unwilling to move from their homes, intervening with local authorities to prevent the involuntary return of internally displaced people to areas of danger, and alerting governments and the public about human rights abuses (Hampton 1998).

International humanitarian governmental organizations such as UNHCR and IMO claim an “absolutely neutral” position as well as non-involvement in the Colombian conflict embracing Law 387 on displacement and following the “main principles of international humanitarian law.” They count on a wide bureaucracy of functionaries specialized in human rights in charge of producing standardized reports about their various humanitarian missions. In order not to substitute the obligations of the state, they channel their humanitarian aid through the Catholic Church and NGOs and international humanitarian agencies. With them they establish standards for the execution of programs and projects, prioritizing “the measurement of results”, “countering of risk factors” and “limiting vulnerability factors” over the quality of assistance provided to displaced populations. Like the programs implemented by the state, these projects see assisted populations as psychologically affected.

Their functionalist approach to displacement (as a fact that can be solved through the identification of causes) is based on the premise that “the causes for internal displacement and the flows of refugees are similar all over the world” (UNCHR web page) and therefore can be solved homogeneously if adequately eradicated or prevented.

National governments, including that of Colombia, welcome international assistance and argue that their own budgets are insufficient. UNHCR involvement, then, complement the state provision of food, shelter and medicines. Depicted by Cohen and Deng (1998) as people who risk hunger, present the highest levels of diseases and are most vulnerable to violations of human rights, internally displaced people also get what is called “emergency relief” from international agencies.

Far from apolitical, the UNHCR has established as a priority issue in its agenda the prevention of fluxes of international refugees since the 1990s. It was concerned that internal displacement would threaten the security and stability of neighboring countries, regions, and through a chain effect, the international system at large (Cohen and Deng 1998). Through “coordinated agency method” and “the establishment of corridors and protected areas,” the UNHCR tries to prevent the “conditions” and “causes” that produce internal displacement.

According to western assumptions of development, “displacement is an indicator of profound problems within a society” and a “symptom of national state dysfunction” (Cohen and Deng 1998:11). In order to fix these two problems, democratic institutions need to be strengthened and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of minorities and indigenous communities, reinforced (Cohen and Deng 1998:11-12).

Inspired by rescue models, like the ones employed by the Colombian state, international governmental agencies’ actions focus on “increasing protection factors” such as the adherence to the rule of law, justice, stability to counter situations of chaos, anarchy and arbitrariness. Similarly, their actions are intended to “decrease stress factors” such as civilian suffering in military combats, lack of work, and domestic violence. They support long-term solutions proposed by the Colombian state such as the monitoring of borders and

the strengthening of local organization. The Secretary-General of the U.N. Millennium Declaration of September 2000 stated as priorities: “protecting the vulnerable and developing a ‘culture of protection’.” Their technical cooperation consists on giving instruction and promoting respect for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. Through “relief and development activities” (OCHA web page) they suggest that areas of global conflict might expect to reach the standards of modern western societies.

Despite the emphasis on human rights, assistance and relief programs follow the mandates of fund-raising and the elaboration of result-reports. The resource-driven and technical demands of relief programs have tended to group internally-displaced people under one ‘problem category.’ They fail to give due attention to the coping mechanisms people already have to face hardship. Their framework of assistance is believed to help their beneficiaries to improve and better themselves through the adoption of a western model of “training programs.” UNHCR programs Cities of Solidarity and Income Generation in Colombia train internally displaced people to “become self-sufficient and integrate” and present them with projects that promote “self-reliance.”

They also promote a unilateral vision of peace and progress through a “politics of compassion” that generates an automatic sympathy locally as well as world wide (Pandolfi 2000). World Vision Colombia has posted in its web page the testimony of a displaced Colombian kid that they sponsor. In the interview he explains his commitment as a peace-builder in his community. He is presented as a forger of values, the iconic figure of an innocent victim from a cruel environment and the bearer of Christian values such as work and commitment:

World Vision: What is the movement for peace building?

K: (...) There are many children who suffer because they do not know how to act in situations of violence. They don't know what to do and they suffer and suffer

because the environment in which they grow is violent. They are living in the middle of the war, and what they learn about is war. If the movement of peace builders reaches these children, we can teach them what peace is good for (...)  
World Vision: Children are very vulnerable. How can they then live in a situation of violence?

K: We are vulnerable because we are not big. And we are vulnerable if they don't listen to us (...) Besides, children might be living in the middle of a war, but there's peace in their hearts, and they have faith in God. They can be at peace, and influence the others so that they follow their example. So the other children are going to say: "Look at that child! He looks very happy!" And they are going to ask themselves, "Why not do the same?" And in this way, peace will multiply. I like working as a Peace Builder; I don't think it's hard (...) We can have fun looking for solutions to problems without wasting time. The idea is to take advantage of time in order to collect the biggest fruits, sooner than later. What advice would you give the children, so that they can become forgers of values and peace builders too?

K: I think we all have to work together in the construction of peace, and also to pray. God will listen. Every one of us can be a small candle of peace that illuminates its own surroundings.

In the last five years, Colombia has entered the scene of international humanitarian aid as a new site of crisis and global humanitarian disaster. As in any other developing place labeled as "poor," aid has been conveyed according to the western assumptions the North has held about the South and the belief that the globe is divided into backward societies and advanced societies to which all these agencies as donors belong. Drawing on simplistic indexes that characterize non-western societies as places with endemic poverty and 'natural violence', their political agenda and duty is to remodel entire societies that do not function accordingly to the global parameters of liberal discourse.

Some years ago, James Ferguson (1990) in *the Anti-Politics Machine* demonstrated how the machinery of international aid de-politicized new political formations rendering them amenable to technical solutions. In a similar way, international humanitarian regimes often reduce Colombia's structural social inequalities as well as violent practices to a technical problem related to "traditional practices" that can be replaced by development experts from non-profit organizations and agencies. Humanitarian agencies often see poverty

eradication and economic development as the best remedies against global instability.

Humanitarian agencies and international governmental organizations have recently played a crucial role in Colombia as new promoters and guides regarding how modernity and development can be achieved as a means to eradicate violence and poverty.

### **Colombian State's Assistance**

In this section I explain Colombian legislation on forced displacement and how the last two governments (Pastrana and Uribe administrations) have addressed the issue of displacement as a tragedy as well as a matter related to the management of poor populations. Despite the existence of an array of various institutions in charge of displaced populations, public policies have been directed to satisfy only emergency assistance and to encourage a small portion of these populations to become modern through training projects of self-help and entrepreneurship. By doing so, the Colombian state has avoided the debate of crucial issues such as justice, truth and indemnity.

For the first time in Colombian history, Law 387 of 1997<sup>48</sup> was instituted thanks to the institutional pressure of NGOs and international agencies appeals to the Colombian state to address its failure to protect its internally displaced populations. For the first time, forced migrants discovered that they had special rights and that dispossession and evictions were not anymore part of the Colombian order of things. Through Law 387 the Colombian state

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<sup>48</sup> Law 387 (1997) recognizes displaced people as juridical subjects and defines a normative and institutional framework to provide an integrated assistance to displaced population that includes immediate emergency attention as well as programs of return, resettlement and stabilization. Decree 173 (1998) adopts the Plan for Integrated Attention to Displaced Populations; Decree 501 (1998) regulates the National Displacement Fund; Decree 489 (1999) invests responsibility for Internally Displaced People in the RSS; and CONPES (National council of social and economic policy) 3057 (1999) concentrates authority and accountability in the RSS.



provided measures to prevent displacement, as well as to protect the human rights of displaced people.

This legislation, though, has an enormous gap with its practice and enforcement. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Decree 2569 declared the RSS a state network of agencies in charge of protecting displaced population. The RSS has undertaken various reforms since its creation in 1997 and is enforced by various Constitutional Court sentences (Muggah 1999:143).

A “preventive scope” borrowed from rescuing models of assistance to address natural disasters has prevailed in public policies. During the Pastrana administration (1998-2002), the state focused on the consolidation of an information system called the “early warning system” through which the RSS could anticipate population removals and report land registration (Muggah 1999:144). Similarly, displacement has been addressed as a sudden impoverishment or economic calamity taking place in areas identified as “rehabilitation” and “consolidation” zones. The “National Plan for Peace and Development” aimed at the creation of incentives for return and rural resettlement thus interpreted forced displacement as a consequence of poverty rather than an explicit violation of human rights.

The state has provided displaced populations with the “emergency humanitarian response” as contemplated in the law but only those who have formally declared the facts that caused their displacement before a state office (Ombudsman, Attorney’s office, Attorney General) can be eligible for the minimum salary stipend over a period of three months and that can be extended for another three months. A “humanitarian kit” is also offered consisting of *mercados* (groceries), cooking utensils and accommodation facilities. This “declaration” of displacement is sent to the RSS that verifies the information and includes the beneficiaries’ names and I.D. numbers within their system of information. This verification

of data is necessary to avoid corruption. However, many of my interviewees complained that many people who were not displaced used these resources on a regular basis. The humanitarian kits have also proven inappropriate for some people's needs and diets, especially those from indigenous groups. Amazingly, the RSS does not provide subsidies for rent.

According to the law, the programs of "return, resettlement and stabilization" include financial support to purchase land, housing, and the insertion of displaced people into the productive sector through technical training. In practice, very few get this kind of assistance. The INCORA used to provide credit mechanisms for smallholders choosing to produce alternative crops. However, there were no agricultural products financially viable to pay back the interest and credit. There is also a system of subsidies for the purchase of land through which people were able to purchase land at 30 percent of the total cost. However, the state only purchased inexpensive isolated and poor-quality lands of limited productivity and in conflict regions (Muggah 1999:145). Recently the state has provided meager possibilities of credit through FINAGRO<sup>49</sup> and BANCOLDEX<sup>50</sup> with very poor results since such credit is allocated only to "modern productive units with some standards of quality and productivity, market-oriented, articulated to productive chains and capable of having ensured selling contracts." (Forero 2004:349)

The Colombian state promotes the idea that displaced populations have to undertake "productive projects." Applicants are presented with technical and economic requirements that are hard and costly to fulfill. Resources coming from state agencies and international donors are given to those applicants who demonstrate that they are entrepreneurial. Only

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<sup>49</sup> Fondo para el Financiamiento del Sector Agropecuario, Fund for the Financing of the Agricultural Sector

<sup>50</sup> Banco de Comercio exterior de Colombia S. A., Foreign trade bank of Colombia S. A.

projects considered profitable market-oriented are offered credit. The idea is to teach the internally displaced how to use modern techniques of production, marketing and business organization to ensure the self-reliance of their projects. For this, the state offers training programs in agricultural, industrial production, and administrative techniques oriented to increase people projects' efficiency. In rural areas the government is promoting programs to support families who are willing to return, eradicate illegal crops manually and become *familias guardabosques* (forest ranger families).

The state notion of "reestablishment" is presented as a process that culminates with the satisfaction of basic material, social and psychological needs: a community is considered reestablished once "its material and security needs are met, its psychological effects overcome, its sense of belonging recovered and its capacity to organize and carry out its decisions according to its interests reached" (Forero 2004:332). There is no reference to the rights of internally displaced to the truth, justice and to moral and material indemnity. This means, first, that the judiciary system does not take any responsibility to investigate the crimes and the violations committed against displaced populations, and second, that economic and material support is not provided as a citizen's claim for fair compensation but as a victim's proven need.

Decree 2007 mandates the identification of the owners, residents, occupants of areas declared under the risk of becoming "forced displacement areas" in order to freeze any kind of transference or transaction of these ownership titles after displacement. Despite the legal procedures to legalize their ownership rights and titles as well as the indemnity for material loss, the practice shows that nothing has been done regarding this issue and internally displaced people are resigned to losing their lands and rarely claim their rights over them

since they have to first solve their survival needs. Neither are there funds to provide housing subsidies that internally displaced people are entitled to according to Decree 951 of 2001.

Following “democratic security” measures, Uribe’s government has set up policies of return that do not guarantee security, are not always voluntary, restrict civil rights, and harass displaced populations. The RSS budget in 2004 could assist only 22% of the people in their system of information (UNHCR 2004: 178-179). One of my interviewees asserts that the state always has good reasons not to provide them with appropriate assistance: “they say that there is no money. But we know there is money. If they have money to buy Jets and arms they should also have money for those that get threatened [by armed groups]”.

Like every other previous administration, Uribe government’s “integral policy of assistance” locates internally displaced among the “most vulnerable and poor populations” in need to return to the places they belong to; not as citizens entitled to special protection and indemnity. Drawing on technical models of assistance the Colombian state intends to create programs for a tiny group of internally displaced to become modern while it has ignored the great majority of them for many decades. Furthermore, this same state has dismissed crucial issues such as people’s indemnity and accountability while at the same time promoting blatant impunity through the peace process for paramilitary groups.

International humanitarian agencies reports and the state technical reviews of displacement contrast to the ways in which victims of war explain their situations and desires for accountability. In the next section I contrast the literature that refers to forced displacement mainly as a traumatic and anomalous experience with my interviewees’ narratives that allude to their fear, silence and courage as responses to a systematic process of intimidation and removal.

## **Countering Victimization**

Internally displaced people are often depicted as a category of need instead of social actors according to the assumptions of most of NGOs, humanitarian agencies reports and journalists. As Rajaram (2002:251) asserts, the people they assist are also taken to be speechless and requiring an agency to speak for them. Humanitarian agencies tend to essentialize internally-displaced people as victims of injustice, oppression and maltreatment of non-democratic and brutal regimes. These representations of helplessness and loss are also used for purpose of fundraising. Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997:xi-xviii) have signaled the disturbing existence of a market for suffering in which distant audiences from secure settings expect danger and tragedies to be consumed as spectacles in the media.

In Colombia these psychosocial approaches that focus on forced displacement's devastating effects prevail and usually veil the historical context in which the violent events took place. Psychosocial approaches and psychiatric studies focus on how such a traumatic experience results in mental health problems creating a prolific discourse based on the famous "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder." PTSD refers to a highly traumatic state after the person has been exposed to "stressful experiences" that include all kinds of situations: from sexual abuse, war, combat, and violent attacks, to natural catastrophes, and life-threatening situations. Victims' different ways of expressing their fear, anger, and mourning for their dead loved ones, get obliterated.

A second problem of this approach is that mental health paradigm depicts displaced people as "disabled populations" and "populations in risk" without mentioning their need of political and juridical spaces to make their claims against war abuses. Two psychiatrists from the Corporation Avre an NGO assisting internally displaced people in Bogotá write:

Once the displaced person resettles in the new place he/she has to face the rise of emotional and behavioral alterations proper of depressive symptoms characterized by distortion of the sense of time, lack of interest in the future, difficulties to make decisions, lack of hope, feelings of isolation and sense of internal void. (Sanchez and Jaramillo 1999:98).

This general medical definition of displacement depoliticizes the effects of forced displacement and defines feelings of sadness and depression as permanent conditions of internally displaced people. Medical discourses often disregard the variety of feelings and claims behind displaced people's narratives. They often locate the "problem" not in political processes that produce massive territorial displacements of people but, rather, within the bodies and minds (and even souls) of displaced people (Malkki 1995:33). Internally-displaced people who live and experience displacement not only talk about their feelings of rage and anger but also about their quest for the reasons of their eviction and their family members' deaths.

My interviewees made sense of their forced displacements by recalling how, just before escaping, fear was accompanied by a sense of impotence and outrage. Ana María, a woman who had previously had a long history of labor migration throughout the Middle Magdalena region, explained to me that when the paramilitaries threatened to abduct her daughter, she felt she was blocked as a person and that fear was overwhelming her on an everyday basis, but that later on that same fear gave her the strength to imagine a strategy for fleeing:

At first it was the fear; then that fear becomes a tremendous impotence, an impotence that does not let you sleep, feel well or have a normal everyday life. From impotence, in the particular case or in our case, after insomnia and all those manifestations of the same impotence, was the courage, the anger, the outrage, the pride and we recovered strength to design gradually our plan to flee. (Woman, 48 years old, from Magdalena Medio).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Inicialmente es el miedo; posteriormente, ese miedo se convierte como en una impotencia bárbara, es una impotencia que no permite dormir, ni estar bien ni tener una cotidianidad normal. De la impotencia en el caso particular o en nuestro caso, después del insomnio y de todas esas manifestaciones de la misma impotencia, fue

Terror of war has left its marks in people's bodies through somatization after displacement. Some of them affirmed that they were sick or in bed after being displaced. People felt that their bodies did not work properly, they usually had headaches, experienced *nervios* (stress), and their children got colds often. They also noticed changes in their children's bodies and moods. Some children who were naughty before displacement now seemed quiet and sad. These symptoms cannot just be treated as medical or psychiatric traumas located in people's minds and bodies. Often interviewees said that what they fear the most while resettling was to be hospitalized. Their suffering would increase, their possibility to find a job postponed, and their sense of autonomy undermined. Displaced people's symptoms of distress need to be seen as temporary body manifestations of an extreme political violence as well as demands of compensation and accountability.

Shortly after displacement, many people refer to anger and rage towards those who harm them "because they did not let us keep going with our dreams" (*por el daño que nos hicieron que no nos dejaron con nuestros sueños de seguir.*) Forced displacement is blamed as the main reason that they have to inhabit untenable spaces of scarcity and it accounts for the suffering that dominates the tone of their discourses.

Myriam, recently arrived from the Pacific Coast, is going through a very tough time and is depressed because they have killed her husband and she feels humiliated in the city due to her lack of resources. Throughout the interview she cried and explained to me that displacement has been a misfortune because she feels she has lost for good her former social standing:

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ya como el coraje, la rabia, la indignación, la soberbia y cobramos fuerza para ir diseñándonos esa estrategia de fuga.

We have been very affected by this displacement for the main reason that we don't get things like we got them over there where we had more possibilities to have things and, as I say it again, this is not a place for me. (Woman from Tumaco, Nariño, 32 years old)<sup>52</sup>

Forced displacement as opposed to voluntary migration seems to have taken out prestige and hamper dreams and future plans but it does not block displaced people from pursuing those dreams later. In the same interview, when discussing the possibility of return with Myriam she refers to her desire to have an improved future:

This is my goal that I want very much. I hope that if I have the opportunity to leave and everything turns out well, and that everything is a success (...) that I get all that I have in mind, get ahead, and, that everything goes well.<sup>53</sup>

Displaced interviewees who had just arrived to the city, tend to see displacement as an extremely difficult process, although most of them had formerly been migrants. The pain they felt was related to the sorrow of having family members killed and their desperate need for justice and accountability. In fact, they knew armed groups were responsible for the difficult moments that they had to live, but they also were certain these groups were not going to be processed for what they did; and it is hard for them to accept the cost of a life trajectory that now is interpreted as if it has been split in two: an idealized before and a terrible present.

Flor María, who has had a difficult time in Bogotá because her son was killed a few months ago in the neighborhood where she lives, attributed all her suffering to the fact that she was displaced two years ago by the guerrilla groups:

This is incomparable. No one who has not been among the people who know what this is when something has happened to them can imagine what one suffers

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<sup>52</sup> Nos ha afectado mucho el desplazamiento por el motivo de que no se dan las cosas a como se daban allá, que teníamos m'a posibilidad de tener las cosa' y.. como vuelvo y repito no es el lugar para mi.

<sup>53</sup> Esa es mi meta mía, quiero mucho, deseo que si llega esa oportunidad de irme, que todo me salga bien, todo me salga un éxito (...) que lo que tengo pensado, sal'i adelante, me salga todo, no? Que me salga todo bien.



(...) for having taken us from the place where we lived, where we used to live well. (woman, 48 years old from El Filo, Santander)<sup>54</sup>

“Maddening,” “hard,” “serious” are all terms that interviewees used to convey the idea of a brutal change in their life plans but also to assess the losses that forced displacement has caused in their lives. Loss of a sense of place, a reputation, social recognition, economic means for a living, material support that brought stability and name. Losses somatized in not being able to sleep, eat, or be at peace, thinking of how to sort out their difficulties and overcome scarcity constitute a permanent quest for a sense of justice. The *pensadera* means a permanent worrying state of mind looking for a way out.

Silence and blocking memories were the most common ways of dealing with the grief of the death of family members. Victims and disappeared are *irreconcilable* absences, as Feldman puts it (Feldman 1995:238). Wherever victims go, they will carry the memory of beloved ones who were killed, but for a while, they will not talk about this mourning. In fact, they find it painful not being able to provide their children with a reasonable explanation of a father’s, mother’s, or grandmother’s death. They just do not find any reason for these deaths. Their silence “is their first wound of violence, the initial and simultaneous damaging of individual bodies and the corporate body.” (Feldman 1995:234)

Their silence also negates the possibility that their suffering might be appropriated and distorted by the state, the anthropologist, or the public functionaries in charge of their assistance. Rosa’s son was killed by guerrilla groups in Urrao, Antioquia. Since then, she and her husband rented a wooden room in the Eastern hills of Bogotá. When I asked her about the

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<sup>54</sup> Esto es incomparable. Nadie, de pronto de las personas que les ha pasado algo, nadie puede imaginar lo que uno sufre (...) por haberlo sacado a uno del lugar donde uno vivía, en donde vivíamos bien.

causes of her son's death, she told me that this information was only hers and that she did not want to share the details about it:

A: Do you now the causes of why they kill him?

R: Dear, this I do not tell anybody, this should not be written, I know it only for myself (...). Why should I continue all this? I know who did it and how, but these are things that do not... (Woman from Urrao, Antioquia, 59 years old)<sup>55</sup>

The destruction of a former sense of well-being is interpreted as an 'invasion', an occupation and interruption by external agents (in this case armed actors and army forces) into people's lives and "interiors." (Said 1986) People have the feeling that violence and death have transformed their former lived world. Places once inhabited are said to have changed for the violations committed there. The physical and symbolic spaces are forever altered and the rituals of intimacy transgressed.

All of their stories describe a sudden change in people's routines and the urgency to escape. This urgency makes them regret the way they fled and many say they had to leave their houses "doors opened"; they did not even have the time to perform an adequate farewell to their dwellings:

We left the house, in other words, with everything. There are houses that remain doors opened, because one does not even think to close them. That is terrible. We went out, one behind, another ahead, with a pirogue. Some jumped into the pirogue, others jumped in too, and the people even the same people from there [who stayed there], when they went back did not know what happened. (Women, 40 years old from Riosucio, Choco).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> A: ¿Usted sabe cuáles fueron las causas por las que lo mataron a él? R: Padre, eso no lo cuento yo, eso no se debe escribir, eso lo sé solamente para mí (...) para que voy a alargar todo eso, yo sé quién y como fue pero para qué, son cosas que no.

<sup>56</sup> Quedó la casa, mejor dicho, con todo. Hay casas que quedan con las puertas abiertas, porque uno ni siquiera se acuerda de cerrar la casa. Eso es terrible. Nosotros salimos unos atrás, otros adelante, con una canoa, se subían unos en una canoa, se subían otros y la gente a veces incluso que la misma gente de ahí, cuando ya empezaban a llegar, no sabía que pasaba.

People try to make sense of such a sudden turning point in their life trajectories using the terms of ‘rupture’ and ‘disorientation.’ Bibiana considers that displacement is especially harsh because she had to leave against her will and therefore cannot recreate the feeling of being at home in Bogotá even when she tries. But, as she explains to me, it is a matter of ripening, *madurar la situación*, meaning overcoming that situation:

It has a very strong impact because it is a change of customs, of culture. Everything, everything, everything gets broken, it gets broken all of a sudden, so one is left in a vacuum, one is left as if one was in a scale, yes because everything is broken. Everything. I don’t know, to assimilate [the situation] one has to be mature. (Woman from Cali, Valle, 48 years old)<sup>57</sup>

The fact that forced displacement has ruined some of people’s dreams does not mean it can be analyzed as a fixed reality. Internally displaced Colombians do not freeze in a permanent state of impossibility. The case of Marlene demonstrates her courage to negotiate with the armed actors and reconstruct her plans in Bogotá. Marlene was under the gaze of paramilitaries who threatened her by saying they were going to abduct her daughter. These armed groups wanted her daughter to be the lover of one of the commanders. They put so much pressure on her that she decided to ask for a meeting with them and proposed them a deal. She will give them all her savings, 12 million pesos (5.200 dollars approximately), her fast food business, her studio with all the materials for the pottery she used to make, if they would not touch her daughter. She was also clear in asking them for some time to flee. They gave her 12 hours. Later, she moved to Bogotá, and as a teacher and business administrator, she accessed the charity institutions connected to the evangelic group she belongs to and proposed to them to teach workshops on religious speech in exchange for groceries and cleaning items that her new students would be willing to give her.

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<sup>57</sup> Es un impacto demasiado fuerte porque es un cambio de costumbres, de cultura. Todo, todo, todo se rompe, se rompe de un momento a otro, entonces uno queda como en el vacío, uno queda como en una balanza, si porque se rompe todo, no sé, para uno asimilar tiene que tener una madurez bastante... para poder madurar esa situación

Internally-displaced people sense of impermanence reflects their constant movement from one place to another, their efforts to knit networks and build informal agreements that enable them to survive and to show that they are doing their best to rebuild their lives. Interviewees counter victimization all the time. Helena states that the idea is “not to inspire pity but organize ourselves according to our needs and interests.” The rupture in life projects generates a new “collective identity code,” as Flor Edilma Osorio (1998, 2003) puts it, in order to differentiate themselves from other newly-arrived peasant groups or other poor populations.

While working with CODHES I met various indigenous male leaders who have been seriously affected by the war. Their talk about the pain and suffering involved in their displacement was totally different from the way male and female mestizo agricultural workers talked about it. Indigenous people did not mention a terrible sorrow due to a loss of material social standing or the ordeals of surviving in the city. What they thought was important to point out were the issues related to their “territory” and community, sources of life, food and social recognition. In novel and humiliating situations, they lacked the food to survive with dignity in the city. The rest of their difficulties (marginality, poverty) were all well-known experiences that had strengthened them politically.

Through an alternative collective interpretation of the history of violence in Colombia, they have undertaken strong and intense political work to denounce the assassination of their leaders and the presence of governmental and multinational interests in their ancestral territories. They assert the need to address the “real causes of the problem,” meaning that they attribute their victimization to the fact that they occupied the biggest and

richest lands in the country in terms of biodiversity and natural resources.<sup>58</sup> They also criticized the lack of results of several investigations and the fact that many agencies and organizations used them to acquire fame and name, thereby profiting from their suffering.

In a similar way, Afro-Colombian organized groups from Chocó used transnational and national political organizations, reinventing networks with kin living in the city in order to face the bloody massacres that have affected the Pacific Coast area since 1996 (massacres of Truandó, Cacarica, Riosucio, and Bojayá). For them, the pain of displacement also includes finding themselves isolated from their family and community in the city due to residential distances and informal work routines. Although their presence in some cities (like Cali and Bogotá) is not new, Afro-Colombians find discrimination a big obstacle to resettling well in Bogotá. However, they manipulate the urban stereotyping urbanites impose on them to reinvent in urban spaces practices related to their food, clothes and music and to make themselves appear trendy and appealing. If, in the past, black cultural forms were despised in the Andean area, today everybody welcomes and appropriates Caribbean rhythms, clothing and afro hair styles.

My interviewees do their best to get rid of the victimization stigma that deprives them of their autonomy. They realize that forced displacement has been a traumatic and painful turning point in their lives interpreted as an invasion and destruction of a former social standing, but they also consider it crucial not to get trapped within the psycho-social discourses that define them as mentally traumatized. In the next section, I address critically the way scholar work and commonly held assumptions of place refer to refugees and

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<sup>58</sup> The 1991 Constitution declared 28% of Colombian territory as inalienable, unseizable and imprescriptible “collective territory” to 91 indigenous groups of 800.000 inhabitants and to more than one million Afro-Colombian people (Suárez y Henao 2001: 31).

internally displaced people as situated in intermediary spaces or tied to dual categories of places that constitute subtle power mechanisms of discrimination.

### **Place and Stigma**

In the first part of this section I propose to revisit the way in which scholars and institutions usually depict refugees as embodying an indeterminate identity because of their loss of place or categorize them in reference to an absence of “origins”. In the second part of the section, I analyze how discourses that discuss place as people’s main source of identity, or discourses that consider places as attributes that define people’s standing produce “spatial incarcerations” (Malkki 1995:28) of internally displaced people. Taken-for-granted ways of thinking of place result in simplistic and dual discourses that rank people and places hierarchically.

Discourses that affirm that internally displaced are in a liminal situation often result in reinforcing otherness obscuring an understanding of the way violent political events have pushed them into unwanted and provisional circumstances. Not only does uprootedness associated to liminality produce uneasiness in the eyes of institutions, it also does the same to those who reside in the areas where migrants arrive.

Literature on refugees has analyzed forced migration as an automatic loss of rooted cultural referents that frames people’s identities and subjectivities; it is seen a process of disruption, loss and re-accommodation (Morgan and Colson 1987); it has been viewed as a loss of confidence, “a disjunction between a familiarity of being in the world and a new reality that threatens that way of being” (Daniel and Knudsen 1995:1); it has been analyzed as an absence of cultural space or alleged intermediate condition (Agier 2002).

In the new global order that Bauman (2004:67) characterizes as “a consumer fest” in the affluent North and “a deepening sense of desperation and destitution in large part of the rest of the world”, refugees are easily represented as outcasts who were expelled from their home-towns to the urban slums and hyper-ghettoes where people in search of sustenance are relegated to the status of “wasted lives.” (Bauman 2004:80).

When people that have just arrived to the city are asked to describe the ordeals they have gone they use terms that can be associated with marginalization, despair, ‘rupture’ and ‘disorientation’; but this does not mean people have adopted that specific social condition. By looking closely at interviews with people who have been more than two years in the city, one finds that they have undergone an incredible personal change and have begun new life stories.

The fact that forced displacement has ruined some of people’s dreams does not mean it can be analyzed as a fixed reality. Internally displaced Colombians do not freeze in a permanent state of impossibility. Osorio (2001) has highlighted the resourcefulness of these communities to mobilize in the middle of war. Among these strategies she mentions a permanent and well-coordinated vigilance, use of resourceful ways of fast communication with support organizations in Bogotá to warn about imminent emergencies, the use of hiding places with provisions in the mountains.

I find that instead of cultural impossibility, people increase their circuits of social, economic, and cultural ties encompassing the various places where they have been in their long itinerary (Rouse 1991, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:14). On the one hand, they keep strong contacts with their former places of residence and with their home communities and,

on the other hand, they try to build new forms of solidarity to alleviate the lack of recognition in the new places of residence.

I also find that in contexts of forced mobility, place-making and identity processes are not things that people possess and lose, but instead, unstable relations of difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:13). Instead of loss of cultural attributes internally-displaced people (like migrants) use a pendular movement between hiding and becoming visible. They conceal some aspects of their identity and stress others depending on the situation. This is a strategic use of multiple cultural repertoires to cope with the new circumstances of their displacement. Among the strategies of invisibility recently arrived displaced populations pretend to be what they are not or they do not reveal who they are. Afro-Colombian displaced members of AFRODES, for example, refuse to be called *desplazados*, a term that they say deprives them from human dignity. They say that the word associates them with poverty and victimization, and these are labels that they got rid off with the recognition of their ethnicity by the 1991 Constitution. Although they settle down in very marginal areas of the city that are stigmatized as poor and dangerous, they display with pride features of their culture that the city dwellers see today as desirable such as dance of rap and reggaeton music, clothes, and hair-styles. Obviously, when looking for a place to rent or during job interviews people have to lie about their eviction; when they need health services or assistance before public offices people need to show their letters certifying them as displaced people entitled by law 387. Some groups even organize take-overs or marches in name of displaced people to get visibility and notoriety.

Most of the studies on internal forced displacement in Colombia as well as the media use the notion of “place of origin” defined as a social or ancestral niche, the domain of the



'the familiar' depicted as 'stable' and unproblematic whereas the new place is associated with concepts of 'foreign' and 'away' (Bello 2001,2004; Suárez 2003; Pécaut 1999). Forced displacement is defined as a violent uprooting from the "social plot" or "social milieu" where people are believed to have been born, raised, lived, ignoring the incredibly high mobility of Colombian urban and rural poor populations who have moved in many directions many times in their lives.

People's place of origin is taken as their unique source of social identity while evidence shows that displaced populations were often born in one town, moved with their parents to another as a result of former waves of violence, like the period known as *La Violencia*, and have migrated several times back and forth to the cities and rural towns when temporary jobs were offered or when they followed the coffee, timber and coca economic booms.

According to this notion of "place of origin," people are supposedly deprived from former public recognition and prestige while disconnected from primordial social environments, ecosystems, and spaces of community interaction (Suárez 2003). The main problem of conceiving forced displacement as a definite disconnection from an originative culture-bed is that internally displaced people like regular migrants would be defined by institutions and state policies in terms of lack: they lack urban skills, proper living standards, social recognition, material patrimony, housing, job, and identity. It is interesting to point out that what makes displaced people's removal particularly hard is precisely how these indices of respectability tied to places are taken as essential qualities that internally displaced people have lost for good when moving to the city.

Institutions, media, and communities of residents often produce discriminatory discourses around refugees typing them as anomalous for being placeless. These discourses make people believe that the relations between host and newcomers are necessarily difficult and crossed by distrust. In her study on refugees, Liisa Malkki (1995) has demonstrated how 'uprootedness' comes to signal moral loss or a pathological condition since a 'normal' person is thought as being naturally and tied to a place and having territorial integrity. It is commonly assumed that being without a place of origin is a "perilous territory of not-belonging" (Said 1984:162). Refugees are not seen as ordinary people, but are represented as an anomaly requiring specialized correctives and therapeutic interventions (Malkki 1992:33).

However, uprootedness is not the only source of discriminatory practices around mobility. Discourses around places taken as fixed cultural attributes of distinction constitute a widely used and powerful discursive practice to talk about refugees and internally displaced people. It is commonly assumed that people's qualities depend on the standing that their places of provenance have within national and global narratives. Instead of blaming the deep political and economic structural discrepancies as the reasons for incredible gaps between places, inaccurate and simplified ideas about distant places are widely used to make assumptions about people who have just resettled. These assumptions often merge with the belief that cultural differences are insuperable or that communities coming from 'outside' have incompatible skills and mentalities from those residing 'inside' (Balibar 1992).

These logics of discrimination based on perceived strangeness and unfamiliarity are historically grounded in class and racist discourses that usually rank places and people in a unilineal progressive scale that goes from backward to modern. Usually people ascribe meaning to places and people "aphoristically", through "external topographies" assigning to

each group of people a set of features as Marilyn Srathern (1988) has put it. Places and people have been imagined and morally represented by using conventionally dualistic and evolutionist schemes (Ferguson 1999) urban/rural, developed/underdeveloped, poor/rich. These dualistic discourses and social stereotypes are strong vehicles used to interpret the other's identities.

Nation-building processes and their topographies of power have classified their places and people as more or less modern, more or less "advanced," stratifying social groups according to perceived origins. The internal borderlands of a country and the relationship between city and countryside, center and periphery are constantly used to qualify people as well as to imagine 'their' places. Meanings and positions ascribed to places have deep implications for the kind of identity in which we want people coming from other places to be inscribed (Wiborg 2004). The practices of discrimination that my informants faced as part of their experience of displacement depend on the prevailing use of these signs and symbols associated with places.

In Colombia rural places have always been associated with backwardness, ignorance, underdeveloped minds and wilderness, especially if located out of the triple Andean chains that have symbolized progress and civilization. Therefore, urban dwellers perceive the internally-displaced people as coming from primordial and backward times. Inversely, the category "urban places" have been thought as poles irradiating development and entrepreneurial spirit, the realm of European values associated with decency and democracy. Therefore, city residents think that the civilized urban landscape has been altered by the arrival of forced migrants from the wild rural 'outside.'

In Colombia, stereotypes and representations of internally displaced people populations draw on these historical class panics and phobias regarding remote places and otherness. Some groups in the city see displaced people as bandits, evacuees, parts of a social epidemic (Naranjo 2002). They are also seen as survivors of the war and therefore transmitters of it, and due to their impoverishment as new plaintiffs, competitors for state resources, and new beggars (Osorio 2003). Some other groups in the city associate displaced people's arrival with a sense of an increased insecurity in their neighborhood whereas some other few sectors of the periphery of Bogotá see displaced people as deserving their support and solidarity since they were former migrants like them (Bello et.al 2000).

Maria Teresa Uribe (2001) has found in Medellín the use of the popular expression “people flee because they owe something.” This is one of the widespread ways in which Colombians refer to people who have to flee. Instead of saying that people have escaped war, this expression is connected to a widely accepted premise according to which one should not “mess with” people who are persecuted because you never know if they were involved in “who knows what dirty businesses” in their places of provenance.

Furthermore, the word *desplazados* has a strong class connotation and associates the word with poor places and populations. Claudia analyzes the powerful and disempowering weight that the word *desplazados* have in Colombia and how she has to counter this label by building what she calls a “dignified life project”:

Because you have[a tag] of displaced, you start feeling undervalued, you stop loving yourself, you don't find any sense in the streets that you walk, or the space where you have the possibility to rest. (Woman from San Miguel, Middle Magdalena region, 48 years old)<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Porque tienes aquí un rotulo de desplazada entonces empiezas a sentirte menospreciada, dejas de quererte a ti misma, no le encuentra sentido ni a las calles que transitas, ni al espacio en el cual tienes la posibilidad de descansar.

Broadcast from the Colombian government have tried to debunk negative stereotypes but they end up creating others by associating ethnic otherness with exotic bioregions presented as close to nature: displaced are represented as Afro-Colombians who always appear dancing and chanting or indigenous people are shown on T.V as ancestral spiritual agents ideally adapted to their environments. Private donors and humanitarian agencies in their films and videos often idealize displaced communities as pristine examples of stoicism and peace.

I argue that analysts and experts on forced displacement haven't emphasized enough the way places and people are imagined, idealized and morally represented according to conventionally shaped urban/countryside dualistic categories (Ferguson 1999). Internally displaced people also represent and talk about their places morally and affectively using these commonsensical dual classifications. They will call 'home' their various previous places of residence and describe them as more natural and authentic places as opposed to the new places called "urban" and understood as enclosed, imposed, polluted, artificially imposed and inauthentic.

People's perceptions of places depend on people's background and trajectories but also on the way war and political economy have transformed them. My ethnographic material shows that interviewees rework and change their feelings and ideas depending on these commonly used labels and stereotypes and according to their commitment to a morally praised sedentarism. Some of them say that they long for a former idyllic rural place where they have roots and despise the city as the symbol of decadence. Some others say that they hold strong beliefs that tie them to their soil and therefore feel the tension between a former idealized homeland and a new rootless environment. If they have had recently bad

experiences in the city interviewees will perceive the urban space as insecure due to their own crime experiences or rumors about insecurity. Whereas others perceive the city as the place they have always dreamt to live in and where they believe that they can materialize their expectations of social mobility.

For some of my interviewees it is important to use the same essentializing images and the ascriptions of status in the new context of residence to counter the negative stereotypes that have been circulating around them. They refer to their places of 'before' in ideal terms to demonstrate they are people with an important past, a reality that for them deserves to be unveiled. By using ruralist themes to talk about their homeland they debunk the stereotypes about war-torn rural places and gain recognition through carefully selected narratives. People describe their former residential places intentionally as peaceful, healthy, beautiful, places where they could practice and enjoy their own life styles at their will. They never explicitly affirm that virulent political prosecution was happening in these same places they were referring to. They want to show that war has really forced them to abandon a better former life.

I would like to provide three examples that illustrate the variety of narratives that I found among my interviewees and the intentional use of dualistic schemes urban/rural to show how place-making processes are representations affectively and discursively constructed.

In one of my interviewees, Ricardo, who was 67 years old and arrived with his wife who was 57, two daughters and one son, spent less than two years in the city of Bogotá affirmed he was getting sick in the room that he was renting because it was very wet uncomfortable, and the city was dangerous and violent. Thanks to her wife's connections

with various NGOs she was able to find several temporary jobs in Bogotá. Later in the interview, I found out that muggers stole an expensive lawn mover he brought from the place where he used to take care of the gardens on a farm. Robbers also mugged one of his sons in the neighborhood where they were staying in Bogotá. Ricardo decided to move and accepted a temporary job as a farm-tenant close to Bogotá where he was currently living with his wife and where they could at least cultivate some of the crops they used to and have contact with nature which was the aspect that they missed the most in the city.

Surprisingly, he never associated his home-town with insecurity despite the blatant fact that he had to flee due to guerrilla death threats to abduct his sons. Ricardo had previously migrated several times yet he depicted home as a very quiet and healthy environment where people had a closed relationship with the soil, enjoy family and neighborhood ties. He found more sense of belonging in the places where he lived before as opposed to urban settings that he perceived as individualistic and devoid of any social support. He associated urban with enclosed spaces and lack of freedom as opposed to a countryside he recalled as more healthy, a morally “pure” environment.

Ricardo thinks, though, that in the city you could easily find entertainment. But he pointed out that these activities were mainly associated with *vicios*, (vices) especially dangerous to his daughters, who he said were “good girls who were used to being good girls in the home” (*muy sanas, muy de la casa*). Ricardo was speaking from the perspective of someone who had aged and had put all his family expectations in owning their own piece of land in the countryside represented as a place of virtue whereas the city is associated with urban moral decay.

In the second case, households of the Kankuamo displaced indigenous group refused to use the word “resettlement” because it implied somehow the forgetting of their homeland where they have contact with nature, source of their spirituality. They emphasized their deep connection with earth and the landscape. Through collective images of their houses, the family left behind, they wanted to show that, contrary to urbanites, they knew the importance their place had in ecological and spiritual terms.

They discussed differently the arrival of young people from their communities to Bogotá. They found that this contact with the city was not good despite the fact that they were more valued by state offices and international agencies as opposed to the discrimination they experienced in the capital of the Province of Cesar, Valledupar.

One of their community’s main premises for their young members was to preserve their traditions, and they saw with great concern the danger of being assimilated to the mainstream western mentality of urban settings. According to indigenous leaders, young people were the targets of westerners’ consumption of the exotic (perceived an alluring part of global capital) and had expectations of obtaining asylum in rich foreign countries. In contrast to their leaders’ thinking, young people said they find good western educational institutions an attractive options from which they expected to get wider opportunities to work later on behalf of their communities, and so they were tempted to follow the example of some boys and girls from the Inga indigenous group who had recently arrived to Bogotá and were already preparing their trip to Canada were they had been granted asylum. In this case the perceptions of homeland were determined by a strong commitment to their notion of territory and especially to their cultural project of ethnic revitalization. Bogotá represented



the danger of losing their culture but it was also the place where they got respect and recognition as an indigenous group.

Some other people interviewed had the sense that in big cities and especially in Bogotá they would find material prosperity, jobs, resources and a better future. The disparities and disarticulation between rural towns and cities with a military state presence but no justice system and the city of Bogotá imagined as a place of progress and node of global market circuits were present in several narratives. This is the case of Ana María, a permanent labor migrant in various towns and cities of the Middle Magdalena River, who had been displaced to Bogotá seven months ago. She had always dreamt of living in the city and been able to contribute to build a better urban place to live in. Despite the fact that she found that people in Bogotá were paranoid, she had found plenty of educational and recreational spaces: libraries, marvelous spectacles of theater, dancing, music, and conferences. She thought that with her daughter they would find a better market in the city to sell the jewelry and fashion accessories they had been designing, making and selling on the streets. With her daughter she had in mind a project to create an association of displaced single mothers who were entrepreneurial and had high expectations. In this case the narrative was from a person who had always moved throughout urban settings looking for job opportunities and who did not long for a rural idyllic space but for success in a big city life-style.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated how forced displacement is a process that goes beyond the trauma and victimhood that humanitarian and psychosocial discourses present. I

also have shown that international and national policies that draw on these discourses usually interpret forced displacement as a natural problem of poor countries. As part of this logic, international humanitarian assistance is based on the idea that their action in poor and dysfunctional countries is to set the international law parameters and development standards that these countries need in order to be modern. Internally-displaced people are usually seen as people in need of the ‘proper’ training to function in a new economic era that requires entrepreneurial spirit and the desire to become competitive. Internally-displaced people themselves know the dangers of being essentialized under these terms and talk about their sudden and imposed unfair radical fall in terms of social standing and their need to see their harm repaired. They are eager to overcome a temporary and imposed situation especially because they become vulnerable to discriminatory classifications that situate them as ‘people tied to war-torn undeveloped places’, as emblems of suffering, and as obstacles to development.

In the next chapter, I will show that displacement is not only a spatial but also mainly a temporal discomfort that opens up the possibility of moving from one present to another (Coutin 2005). People carry with them memories of their previous homes and at the same time reconstruct imaginatively and materially their new ones through memories and objects.

## Chapter 3

### Remembering the Land of “Before”

In this chapter I will show how interviewees create an alternative temporality and spatiality as substitutes for their unwanted present conditions as forced migrants. By making present an absent lived time and space they assemble an oppositional practice of time (Mueggler 2001). Interviewees call up the past in the form of a fixed image of a foundational home, a stable and nourishing motherland opposed to the discontinuity and fragmentation that violence and forced displacement has inflicted on them. By recalling land, resources, food, social ties, wealth, possessions and special rights over land as a valuable patrimony, internally displaced people claim responsibility for the losses suffered due to forced displacement. I critique the term “places of origin” used by most of the literature that I reviewed on forced displacement in Colombia to refer to a primordial source of identity. When I mention their “place of before” I am referring to narratives built upon affective and sensorial reminders of stability and unity. I propose, instead, the term “memory places” (Ricoeur 2004) to refer to the narratives through which people describe places that in the past constituted important sources of wealth, work, improvement, and identity claims. Memories become inscriptions and monuments of an affective place reconstituted through the work of memory. This discourse around a place of before stands for a dreamt territory where people had abundance and happiness substituting the marks of death, horror and destruction that war has left on people’s lives (Riaño 2002).

In the first part of the chapter, I show how interviewees present their places in terms of abundance and wealth. Food, life-stock, work, social ties, possessions, and knowledge

become intangible possessions, part of the expected conventional cultural inventory that internally displaced people feel it is important to talk about. I discuss how interviewees try to erase from their narratives of before elements related to the pain inflicted by war because these obscure the highly valued moral picture of that imagined place that they share and want to remember. I show how people's narratives are interwoven through a constant dialogue and comparison between the places of before and the place they are living right now. In the second part of the chapter, I show that material culture and memory are closely intertwined. Some of my interviewees were able to keep or save very few possessions from the times of before but they used them as resourceful means to cope with their processes of present reinsertion and resettlement.

### **Place-memories**

Very soon in my fieldwork, I realized that it was inappropriate to ask people about the possessions that they brought with them to Bogotá. Many of the people interviewed had to run away and packed only essential clothing: “we brought nothing, only our clothes” (*Nada, a la ropita no más, con las puras mechas no más*) says Marlene who has been displaced two times in her life and remembers how bad she felt when she had to go to the RSS offices with her work boots on:

- What did you bring with you?
- Nothing, the boots, the clothes that I had on and that I was wearing when we came, work clothes. The boots that we used to wear there, up to the knee, I had to stay twenty days with those boots because I did not have [any money] to buy [shoes]!. (Woman, 48 years old, El filo, Santander).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>“- Qué se trajeron?

- Nada, las botas, la ropa que tenía uno puesta encima y con eso nos vinimos, ropa de trabajo. Las botas que uno usa allá a la rodilla, me tocó quedarme aquí veinte días con esas botas porque no tenía con que comprar!

I realized that, instead, interviewees wanted to talk about what they had previously owned in their former places of residence. The absence of their possessions connected to their past practices was a crucial topic. Thus, I propose to address the material world and memory as one integrated imagined cosmology through which people see themselves in relation to their experience of displacement and their former and new places. I analyze this way of remembering as a process of idealization of the past with an integrative purpose in the reconfiguration of self (Battaglia 1995).

I agree with the perspectives that critique memory as a “cabinet” in which people store, register and decant series of important events, possessions and images of their past in a linear and cumulative sense of time. Memory is a constant interplay between “then” and “now,” a dialectical and ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding (Terdiman 1993). Memory and oblivion are part of an inaccurate process of selection that implies distance and also efforts to remember affectively charged events. Through remembering, people rectify the deficiencies of their past, “to fit the models of what might have-must have- happened” (Kirmayer 1996:176).

As a different representation of time, space, and reality, I argue that memory involves emotions and imagination, delirium and fantasy. Furthermore, emotions play an important role in the recollections interviews made of their past. Experiences of unsettlement, loss, and recurring terror produce what Clifford calls “discrepant temporalities” “through which linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed future” (1994:318)

Remembering a place is an interpretation and a reconstruction of the past that intrudes insistently in the present. By “past” I do not mean an objective record of past experiences,

but the ways in which people reconstruct meaningful socio-cultural processes they have experienced (Trouillot 1995). I would add to this that people's pasts are fictive ways in which they narrate and remember them morally. I am interested in the ways in which the groups I interviewed represent their pasts, relate and view themselves in relation to their life trajectories. By living the present in historical terms (Malkki 1995) people forcibly displaced were able to integrate and re-suture a life trajectory that was thought to be on the verge of dissolution.

Memory and oblivion are part of this dialogue between before and after but also a sensorial and affective dimension that reconnects people with their pasts. Nadia Seremetakis (1994) proposes that memory is an extra sense people have. People I interviewed connected memory and place through the body. Sensory experiences like smells of home-made food, music, and routine activities such as work and leisure, constituted the memories people used to talk of their former everyday life. Feelings and bodily sensations generated in the past help interpret interviewees' past. There is a sensory dimension of memory that heightens in exile.

The "sensory" is also "a record-keeper" of material experience, something dispersed out there on the surface of things that can invade the body and take you to past experiences (Seremetakis 1994:9). Marcel Proust (1987) in *À la recherche du temps perdu* calls those sudden impressions, sensations, and feelings "involuntary memories"; dead recollections and affective experiences of the past that regain their intensity in the present:

The best part of our memory is outside of us, in a rainy breeze, in the musty odor of a bedroom or the smell of an early season fire (...) outside of us? Within us, rather, but concealed from our vision in a more or less prolonged forgetting. (Proust cited in Terdiman 1993:218).

People's narratives are crossed by many of these sensory flash backs that engendered moments of joy and happiness or recaptured feelings of anguish and extreme longing. The

following description illustrates how one of my visits to one of my interviews becomes an encounter crossed by sensorial and affective dimensions of memories:

As I reached Nancy's house located in a southern district of Bogotá called Molinos it seemed as if I was entering a *palafito* located above a deep river with a bridge made of wooden platforms to avoid the mud that the rainy season had brought and that led us to her house's entrance. I had brought a cake for Nancy and as she opened the box she said she felt the aroma of her land and the plantain with cheese that they used to prepare in her house. In contrast, during one of my encounters at the House of Migrants, Orlando told me that he avoids to listening to the music he used to play in his home-town because he gets melancholic and depressed; he is not ready for the overload of emotions that memories produce in him.

Through elements of their former sensory relations to their material world people recall their homelands. According to them, the two collective workshops I organized with AFRODES and ONIC, gave them the possibility of revisiting important aspects of their past such as landscape, land, work, routines, nature, and views of their histories of violence. Participants said they were "transported" to their places of before. Through the workshops they could incorporate and recirculate affects from the past and bring them back to the present. In other words, people made the past live again by evoking it together with others, and helping each other to remember shared events or knowledge (Ricoeur 2004) I argue that, through reminiscences, interviewees resume their lives and take account of their pasts. By narrating place-worlds (Basso 1996) they revive former times as a personal and collective self-reflection.

People I knew and worked with considered that recalling the place they came from was fundamental in the construction of their identities. Indeed people had invested incredible efforts to build and improve the places in which they had lived as well as the living conditions of the communities they had encountered in their journeys. Places were commonly discussed as repositories of culture and indexes of respectability. In this chapter, I argue that the sense of places is not spatial categories but temporal discursive formations that people use to claim social recognition when they find themselves deprived from it. The sense of place is an imagined representation that displaced people use as means to be recognized as people with a past, land, name, community work, social recognition, social entourages, nature, and knowledge. This is important because their memories, so interviewees say, constitute “the only thing of which they cannot be dispossessed”. As one of the participants of the workshops states:

What made me happy was to remember those good times that we lived in the past and that nobody will be able to destroy. We can be evicted from our homes, from the farm, dispossessed from everything we had, but that [time] that we enjoyed there with everything we had, no body will take it from us. (Afro-Colombian male leader, 35 years old)<sup>61</sup>

## **Motherland**

Some interviewees used to run small fast-food stands and restaurants in their towns of previous residence. A second group lived in a house they owned in town, and worked as sharecroppers in fields they cultivated in the countryside. A third group lived in villages, and were employees in extraction agro-industries or cattle farms and owned their community shops where they worked on the week-ends. Yet, for all of them land was recalled as the

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<sup>61</sup> Lo que me alegro bastante es recordar uno esos tiempos buenos que se vivieron en el pasado y que nadie los va a poder acabar. A nosotros nos pueden sacar de la casa, de la finca, de todo lo que teníamos, pero eso que disfrutamos allá de todo lo que teníamos nadie no lo va a poder quitar.



source of food, therefore, life-force and independence in terms of sustenance. People who worked in agricultural and commercial activities often say that they had so much food they were able to give what was left to other people in need of it.

Temporal distance from the past as well as geographical estrangement amplify the symbolic meaning of former practices: agricultural workers from the Amazon basin said that they missed the freedom of waking up and feeling able to get in and out, meaning that as sharecroppers they did not have to follow a strict labor schedule working in the fields and in close contact with nature.

This notion of land's association with freedom is based on the ways in which peasant movements had historically appropriated plots of land in Colombia. Access to land had usually implied a long process of invasions framed within collective struggles that end up with the individual acquisition of property. By invading lands and making them productive many poor rural populations had claimed rights of possession later. The project to have a plot of land and a house of their own (*lo propio*) constituted an ever present element of interviewees' remembrances. Male *colonos* said that they were, tied to their lands (*apegados*) despite the fact that some of them were employees of extracting companies or employees in cattle farms. To own your own land and work it (*trabajar la tierra de uno, propia*) means to benefit from a main source of wealth (*sacarle provecho a la tierra*) and the possibility of avoiding employment as an agricultural employee. Lands mean acquired rights, efforts and time invested in their improvement, and an important family patrimony. Land is a source of economic stability to pay for family projects, especially their children's schooling in towns.

In contrast, indigenous men asserted that land was a mother and life provider, the "territory" where their political organization resides. As I will analyze in chapter 4, for

indigenous discourse, land means the recovery of an ancestral territory encompassing a spiritual tie with nature, an intense training in political indigenous organization and the recovery of traditions such as community agricultural work (*minga*). The integrity of their territories means political power, a long history of land recovery, and the source of their cultural knowledge and autonomy. Indigenous groups do not remember their lands as possessions separated from traditions, community recognition and nature. They argued that forced displacement is a symptom of the gap that capitalist westerners have created between humans and nature. Therefore, they promote a new ecological ethos to get back to the path of obedience and respect towards their traditional practices and their basis in nature.

Similarly, Afro-Colombians refer to lands as “inheritances” indicating the ancestral character of their territorial rights and the very recently acquired collective lands titles based on law 70, 1993. As in the case of indigenous groups, they remember their lands as natural sanctuaries that they respect and preserve. They affirm that their sense of place implies a unique lifestyle of enjoyment and respect towards nature based on culturally combined practices of horticulture and fishing. Collective lands have become important reminders of who they are and what they can do with them later in their lives, as an Afro-Colombian woman comments:

So my father had an inheritance, the inheritances that his parents left him, my grand-parents (...) My father always recommended me: - Pastora, remember those lands that you can sell and with that you can buy housing, with that you can buy lots of things and this and that. (Woman, 48 years old from Tumaco, Narino).<sup>62</sup>

By pooling and selecting carefully pleasant and comforting retained aspects of their pasts interviewees construct a moral image of motherland. During my workshops,

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<sup>62</sup> Pues mi papa tenía era herencia, las herencias que sus viejos le habían dejado, mis abuelos (...) Mi papá siempre me recomendaba: - Pastora acuérdesese de las tierras que usted puede vender eso y con eso puede comprar vivienda con eso puede comprar muchas cosas y esto y lo otro.

participants used notions of attachment, affection, familiarity and intimacy as powerful symbolic devices of belonging to their lands.

Internally displaced interviewees often referred to a comforting feeling of home maintained through social relations. Through memory, interviewees went over their former domestic space in the present conveying an embellished portrait of it (Bahloul 1996). One Kankuamo indigenous leader described his house by pointing out that although most of them lived in western-style houses, he always remembers the traditional Kankuamo house associated with indigenous values of family reunion and commensality by locating its spatially iconic elements:

In one corner of each house there was a ripening plantain as well as mango tree, a pineapple plant and an orange tree” (...) Starting [by saying that] one as an indigenous person starts since one is a kid to share with nature, and from the environment where one lives. Our homes were a hut, they were shacks, there we felt, we ate, slept, there we sat to talk, but now as the westernization arrived and now our houses are like this, and each and every one of us takes by its side. When in our tradition we sat to talk at least, to share with old leaders the wisdom that they had about their environment.<sup>63</sup>

The affective and moral power of these images of the traditional home-place was intensified through its absence or denial caused by mobility. Dispossession, for instance, heightens the experience of belonging to the places people have abandoned. People I interviewed evoked home with “images of the happy space” (Bachelard [1957] 1994) attached to past and highly valued social practices such as the cultivation of land, obedience to traditions, respect for old community members’ words, and responsibility in their political leadership. The content of memory makes reference to social conventions and acceptance of

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<sup>63</sup> En un rincón de cada casa había un gajo de guineo maduro; así mismo un palo de mango, una mata de piña y un palo de naranjo (...) Empezando de que uno como indígena empieza desde pequeño a compartir con la naturaleza. Y desde el mismo entorno donde uno vive. Las casa de nosotros eran una choza, unos ranchos, aquí comíamos, dormíamos, nos sentábamos a hablar, pero ahora con la occidentalización llegó y ahora las cosas de nosotros son es así y cada uno coge por su lado. Cuando en nuestra tradición nos sentábamos al menos a hablar, a compartir entre los mayores la sabiduría que ellos mismos tenían del entorno.

tradition in the name of the necessary continuity between past and the present (Misztal 2003:99).

Most of the Colombian literature on forced displacement has taken people's references to their lands of previous residence as geographical and territorially rooted places of origin (Bello 2004, Pécaut 1999, Suárez and Henao 2001, Uribe 2000). None of these studies have analyzed how "home" can be a carefully selected discourse presented as a purified space of belonging: always familiar, safe and comfortable (Ahmed 1999). This literature has not signaled that homeland is a representation constructed through the obliteration of all the unpleasant authoritarian relationships, domestic abuse for many, even fear, restrictions and political persecution.

People transform their lost land into an Eden in what Rodgers calls an "imagined place of belonging" (cited in Turton 2004:23). In my interviews there is a 'before' when there was calm and a happy quotidian life when suddenly a bad omen interrupts it: the arrival of armed strangers; the death of their dogs by poisoning; the killing of family members.

### **A Land of Plenty**

As part of the romantization of the before, most of these narratives allude to a remote past, their childhood, a time of an excessive wealth. Interviewees recalled that gold and relics were found everywhere in the farms where they were raised. They said they found in the hacienda houses where their family used to live boxes and drawers full of golden chains. People from mine areas remembered how they found gold in the ground near small creeks while they were playing:

Because I remember that one time I went out like when it rains like this, right, and I went down to wander here and there and found gold, I found pieces of gold and I [said]: - Here aunty I found this. So she took them and brought them to the jeweler. (Woman, 48 years old, from Tumaco, Chocó)<sup>64</sup>

Pastora describes the abundance of her uncle's big agricultural farm that produced coconut, guava, sugar cane, pineapple, orange packed in wooden containers that they sold in Tumaco where she lived during her childhood. She remembers that they had a big kitchen with big and bright copper pots hanging to prepare guava syrup:

Good food, oh yes, in other words, there was no scarcity there. I don't know, there was no scarcity. There one did not have to buy anything. Everything was there, the bananas, oranges fell, all the fruits fell on the ground where they ripened (...) they can dispossess us from our goods, but the only thing that remains is the education (...) how can I tell you, there, in other words, in the house there were pots, copper pots, in which they made deserts, and this makes me think did they [armed groups] take them also?, who knows. (Woman from Barbacoas, Nariño, 48 years old)<sup>65</sup>

As part of the evocation of childhood, memories are also occasions for self-reflection about tasks they used to perform when they were living with their families. Some women said that by the time the interview took place they had already forgotten the duties and activities they were expected to learn and perform on a daily basis as young girls in their childhood household. In the following quotation the presence of fire in Pastora's memories of home is an evocative image used carefully to indicate her sense of former protection and wealth:

Women kept knitting, they made baskets, they made fans, because there we had a fire-wood stove, we made the basket-fans to blow the stove, we made the baskets to carry all that chocolate, to carry the oranges, or in other words, the art-crafts that we made there. I believe I am forgetting already to make baskets. Then you

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<sup>64</sup> Porque yo me acuerdo que una vez me fui así como cuando llueve, no, y yo me bajaba a andar por ahí y encontraba oro, encontraba pedazos de oro, y yo: - Ve a tía como me encontré esto. Entonces ella entonces lo cogía y lo llevaba para donde el joyero

<sup>65</sup> Buena alimentación, eso si, mejor dicho, allá no había escasez, yo no sé, allá no había escasez, allá no tenía uno que comprar nada. Todo estaba allí, los bananos, bocadillos caían al piso, la naranja, eso caía, toda fruta cae al piso cuando ya esta madura se cae al piso (...) los bienes a uno se los pueden quitar, lo unico que le queda a uno es el estudio(...) como le digo allá eso era mejor dicho en la casa habían ollas, ollas de cobre, en eso se hacen los dulces, y yo me pongo a pensar será que los mismos [grupos armados] se apoderaron de eso? No se

take the *rampira*, which is a stick, it is a stick let me show you. How do I tell you? You have to take out a *guasca*, so women spent their time learning the basket artcraft. (Woman 48 years old, from Tumaco, Narino).<sup>66</sup>

Further in her life-history, she describes how the “paradise” in which she used to live changed radically the day she witnessed a fight with machete between her uncle and his neighbor. It was a fight over land edges that started because one family member moved the fence. The neighbor killed her uncle and she was the only witness. Since then, her life has been a constant fleeing from one place to another. With her family, she moved from Candelillas to Tumaco, where, as rumor had it, the assassin was lifting each and every mosquito-net in town to find her. There she got married and decided to go back to Tumaco looking for her inherited lands but the guerrillas killed her husband. She moved again to Buenaventura but there she found out that paramilitaries were recruiting and killing young people. She decided then to flee to Bogotá.

Memories also trigger reflections about who one presently is, who one used to be and who one might become. What makes Manuel’s accounts especially nostalgic is the fact that he was very well known back home in an activity that he cannot perform in city:

I invested most of my time in sailing, thirty something years sailing. For me the change was very abrupt, very hard for me, in the environment in which I was raised, next to the water, eating fish and swimming. I learnt how to swim before I was six years old. Because I was a sailor, with a well-known reputation, very committed and with a lot of influence there, and responsible, above all. (Man, 50 years old, from Riosucio, Chocó).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Las mujeres mantienen tejiendo, que canasto, hacen los abanicos, porque por lo menos allá... el fogón era de lena, se hacen los abanicos para soplar el fogón, hacer los canastos para cargar la cantidad de chocolate o cargar el naranjal, o traer mejor dicho la artesanía por allá hacer esas cosas, yo ya creo que me estoy olvidando ya de hacer canasto. Entonces por lo menos se coge la rampira, que es un palito venga le digo pero tienen como le digo, se le saca una guasca, entonces las mujeres se dedican a aprender eso de la cestería.

<sup>67</sup> Yo me dediqué mucho tiempo a la navegación, treinta y pico de años navegando, esto para mí el cambio fue muy brusco, muy duro para uno, en el ambiente donde me crié, a orillas del agua, comiendo pescado y nadando, yo sé nadar desde antes de los seis años. Porque yo fui navegante de mucha trayectoria, muy comprometido y con mucha influencia allá y responsable ante todo.

Abundance of food is a constant and recurrent theme in people's narratives. Food has an important symbolic value as a marker of wealth and social status and a source of health and sustenance in rural areas in Colombia. Abundance of food brings memories of social gathering, festivities and family commensality.

People asked about the possibility of cooking their traditional meals during the workshops breaks. These breaks became important spaces for the discussion of memories based on aromas and tastes but also to comment about ways of cooking before the war affected their homeland. In one of the workshops we cooked *viuda de pescado*, the main dish served during *asambleas* (important councils attended by the leaders of the four ethnical groups of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta) and made out of a fish called *bocachico*. By commenting on the preparation of the *bocachico*, a fish of the rivers, Archimedes locates geographically Atánquez, the town he comes from, located in the valley between the Rivers Badillo and Guatapurí with its three hills, called Pampa, Gloria and Juaneta, along the road that connects it to the rest of the Caribbean savannah:

A: since we were born near the location of El Badillo and Guatapurí rivers, we eat fish. We eat the *cunche* with the fish on top. The thing I was telling you before the *bastimento*. You put the *bastimento* under and on top you put the meat and you cook it. There is gets tasty (...) basically we served everything made of wood, of *totumo*. And when we are in council we put in leaves, *guineo* (plantain) leaves. And there you eat, everybody eats from there. But by nature, we the Kankuamo, we eat a lot because we have been raised in that abundance. We eat a lot, I say, sometimes even too much. That is why here [in the city] we have a hard time. During our councils there is plenty of food (...)

Q: But the *bocachico*, do you fish it still?

A: Sure we used to fish, but you know that the river, the thing about the destruction, the environment, so people from Valledupar entered with dynamite and that damned thing killed the matrix. Basically the fish that we eat we have to bring from El Banco, Magdalena, because we had to, we had to. To alleviate that a little, we are making those wells so the hatcheries will be able to reestablish the basic food source. (Man from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, 40 years old).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> A: -Desde que nacimos por la ubicación de los ríos, el Badillo y el Guatapurí, nosotros comemos pescado. Se come el *cunche* con el pescado encima. Lo que les hablaba hace rato del *bastimento*. Se echa el *bastimento* abajo y arriba se echa la carne y se cocina. Ahí coge el sabor (...) básicamente nosotros utilizábamos allá todo

Although participants said they enjoyed the workshop because they could taste again the dish they like the most, they complained that the fish we had bought in Bogotá was too small to be cut in two as they traditionally did to prepare it with the proper seasoning. This activity was an opportunity to talk about the times before the paramilitaries arrived, when ceremonial meals were organized with pomp to discuss their project of cultural recovery (Cf Case of Kankuamo group discussed in Chapter 4).

People talk of the past places in terms of an incredible amount of food and meals they were used to having, crops they cultivated, livestock they owned, animals they hunted or fish they captured, to point out that they have never suffered the scarcity they were experiencing in the city. In the courtyard of their houses they raised animals such as chickens, birds, parrots and pigs. Interviewees said that they usually had dogs, cows, sheep, and mules for them to move and sell their crops around. Before their displacement, they ate meat at least once a week, when they killed a pig or a cow and they drank milk everyday. Livestock such as pigs and chickens were especially praised. People mention their sale used in case of emergency or destitution. This is a practice they could not rely on in the city. Men and women from the north of the Pacific forest who say they used to combine agriculture in a small plot of land with fishing activities stress the variety of fish they were able to capture using different techniques:

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de palo, de totumo. Y cuando estamos en asamblea si se echa en unas hojas, hojas de guineo. Y ahí se come, todo el mundo come de ahí. Pero por naturaleza nosotros los Kankuamo somos comelones, porque nos criamos en esa abundancia. Nosotros comemos mucho, yo digo a veces, hasta demasiado; por eso nosotros aquí pasamos trabajo. En asamblea eso es comida a la lata (...)

Q: - pero ustedes el bocachico lo pescan ahí?

A: - Claro le pescábamos pero tu sabes que el río, la vaina de la destrucción, el medio ambiente, entonces la gente de Valledupar entraba con la dinamita y esa vaina mataba la matriz. Ya básicamente el pescado que comemos hay que llevarlo del Banco Magdalena, porque toca, toco. Para poder aliviar un poquito se esta haciendo los pozos esos, los criaderos para poder ahí nuevamente reestablecer ese alimento que es básico allá.



The *trinchera* is like a basket that we used to place at the mouth of the rivers, when one wanted to eat other type of fish different than sardines or *barbudo* that is called here *Capax*. (Woman, 48 years old, from Salaquí, Chocó)<sup>69</sup>

In Bogotá, instead of meat, they had to eat rice and brown-sugar water (*agua de panela*) as well as all sorts of grains that they ironically call *pepa*, meaning that they were compelled to eat only beans, lentils and peas in the city. They said that the meat they sold in the city had chemicals and hormones that undermine their vitality, in contrast to the herbs with which they used to season their meals. The fish that they saw in the urban display cases were too expensive, out of reach of their tiny budget. In the city they had to ration food. As Jaime, one of Doris' children put it, "now they ate a quarter of everything." Some of them had to go to CORABASTOS to get the leftovers in good condition that the vendors were willing to give them (Cf Video).

Most of the people interviewed agreed that the amounts of food they used to have ensured their well being and health. Celebratory events as well as practices involved in food production habits reinforced their relational ties. They stressed the importance of keeping the practice of cooking and eating home-made meals because they brought affective and sexual potency as opposed to polluted urban food "full of chemicals." Moreover, the domestic prepared food is the main vehicle to retain collective remembrances and feelings.

### **Former Work and Social Standing**

A family and friends' entourage constituted a recurrent element of this idealization of the land of before. People said they missed their co-workers, their friends, and family

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<sup>69</sup> La trinchera es como un canasta y uno lo colocaba en la boca de los ríos, cuando uno quería comer otro tipo de pescado diferente a la sardina o al barbudo que aquí llaman capax.

members. Rocío referred to an ordinary day back home using the images of a happy time when her father and husband that she missed terribly were alive.

Q:-How was an ordinary day back home?

R: -Happy and then she continued: “-everything so good, we spent the day happy (...) I lived well, it was nice because friends visited me, we went out to go camping, and go on retreats. (Woman from Granada, Antioquia, 17 years old).<sup>70</sup>

Yet, further on in the interview, when I asked Rocío if she would like to go back to Granada, her home-town, she answered me:

R: In some respects I would like to be there but the fear is too much

A: fear of what?

R: fear of violence, of everything of what is going on there, when I was there. Because they killed him [her husband] and they killed my father. You think that they are also going to kill you. (Woman from Granada, Antioquia, 17 years old)<sup>71</sup>

Those who were owners of their own businesses say that they had a happy everyday life and most of their material needs were met. Ana, for instance, recalled her life before the killing of one of the members of her family as happy days that would never return related to the fact that her husband used to make enough to live well distributing groceries in the Middle Magdalena region:

We used to go out to such and such place, we went out do *paseos*, we enjoyed at the shores of the river, we spent two or three days there, friends of mine came and took my children with them (...) Now is different, that is, those days I know they are not going to come back, I know that they are not going to come back. (Woman 30 years old, from Pivijay, Magdalena).<sup>72</sup>

There is a nostalgic feeling towards their former social standing, name, and qualities.

They stress their former social recognition and the ways in which they were portrayed in

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<sup>70</sup> - feliz. Y luego dice: - todo como tan bueno, pasaba uno el día feliz (...) vivía muy rico, era rico porque me visitaban mucho las amistades, salíamos íbamos a campamentos, a retiros

<sup>71</sup> R: Por cosas quisiera estar allá pero es que el miedo es mucho

A: el miedo a que?

R: miedo a la violencia, a todo lo que pasa, yo cuando estaba por allá como lo mataron a él [her husband] y mataron a mi papa uno piensa que ya lo van a matar a uno.

<sup>72</sup> Salíamos para tal parte, salíamos, la pasábamos rico a la orilla del río, pasábamos dos, tres días, venían unas amigas que se llevaban a los niños (...) Ahorita es diferente, o sea, yo esos días se que no van a volver, yo se que ya no van a volver.

their home-towns. When I asked an interviewee if he was well known in the place where he lived he answered: “Imagine, I go there and [they receive me] as if the major was arriving. (*Figúrese yo voy por allá y eso es como si llegara el alcalde o algo así.*) By evoking the past and the social standing they had in their former places of residence, people reestablish their dignity in their present. This way of reminding themselves of who they were is a signifying practice taken up by a group to articulate, legitimate and constitute their selfhood and relationship to others (Antze and Lambek 1996:viii).

Men affirmed that work relationships before and after displacement had radically changed. Before as workers or patrons, interviewees said they accorded their labor contracts by word and they insisted that, back home, employees were valued and protected, indicating that they found exploitative the conditions in which they were currently hired in the city:

There were no papers, no commissions because we, the people of the countryside, we are very organized and serious. When one used to have workers over there, you have to give them housing, drinks and food. Instead here you have to live humiliated, do what the patron wants and he can fire you as soon as you do something wrong. There you keep the employees, you take care of them. (Man, 40 years old, from Santa Rosa, Bolívar)<sup>73</sup>

Possessions tied to work are remembered as important weavers of social relations. Memories of their small business have the power to evoke interviewees’ former standing and to link them personally to artifacts imbued with attachment and affection. Display of work paraphernalia is a major way to talk about their prestige and interactions with others before. Interviewees wanted to stress that they were people who had their belongings and owned their own businesses. Some of them said that they lived in some kind of comfort, *con comodidades*, to indicate they run and had well-equipped stores. Through an enumeration of

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<sup>73</sup> No había papeles, no había comisiones porque nosotros, la gente del campo, somos muy organizados y serios. Cuando se tienen empleados allá, se les tiene que dar hospedaje, bebidas y comida. Mientras que aquí toca vivir humillado, hacer lo que el patrón quiera y lo despide a uno apenas hace algo mal. Allá los empleados se conservan, se cuidan.

possessions, José Miguel explains how his business selling food and drinks brought him fame, stressing the number of social bonds he was able to make through it:

We used to cultivate all kind of crops, I had a business inside of my house, I had a good reputation. I killed a cow every eight days. I had a fish hatchery. I had swineherds. I had lambs. I had plantain, pineapple and all kind of crops. During the day I used to communicate and greet people. I knew with one hundred or two hundred people. Many families used to visit us, sometimes eighty to one hundred families. (Man, 40 years old, from Santa Rosa, Bolívar)<sup>74</sup>

According to interviewees' narratives, the loss of their properties and belongings occurred when they had reached the dream of building their houses or after they had accumulated enough earnings to own their own business or to undertake the improvement of their dwellings. In other words, loss took place after an important investment had been made or after they had accumulated an important family patrimony. With displacement, important sources of value and indexes of achievement were lost. However, what for many had been a repetitive situation in their lives had not necessarily entailed lack of hopefulness. In the following quote Rosa who had been displaced three times due to political persecutions against her activism as a community leader told me:

The same thing happened in 1985 in Suárez, when I was just settling down I had to flee leaving everything. I said, it is not fair because of my house. I was just building it. I just finished one part of it and what was missing was the ground floor, but they[paramilitaries] took it all the material. (Woman, 48 years old, from Cali, Valle).<sup>75</sup>

Men and women missed their work tools such as electrical sewing machines, machetes, shovels, axes, hoes, “things among which you have been raised to work the soil”,

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<sup>74</sup> Se sembraba toda clase de agricultura, tenía negocio dentro de la misma casa, tenía fama, mataba una res cada ocho días. Tenía estanco para pescado, tenía porquerizas, tenía corderos, tenía plátano, pina y toda clase de agricultura. En el día yo me comunicaba o me saludaba con conocidos con cien o doscientas personas. Nos visitaban muchas familias, nos visitaban cualquiera ochenta o hasta cien familias.

<sup>75</sup> Me pasó lo mismo que me pasó en el 85 en Suárez, que apenas me estaba estableciendo me tocó salir dejando todo, yo decía, no se justifica porque yo en mi casa apenas la estaba construyendo, apenas la termine una parte porque le faltó la plancha y todo el material eso se lo llevaron.

utensils such as vessels and kitchen knives, furniture they abandoned like beds, closets, electrical devices, a TV or a refrigerator. They also remembered the machines and items that were part of their small business, store, and craft ateliers. These items were not only an important source of income but also artifacts invested with an intense personal experience and sentimental value.

Land and possessions people acquired as sources of work are three different categories of wealth (Ferguson 1992) that were part of the ranking of individuals in rural or semi-rural areas. Work possessions and domestic items are weavers of social relations often evoked in interviewees' narratives to demonstrate their position in relation to the larger interpersonal and cultural world in which they lived. Images of their valued material world have a commemorative symbolism that serve as an animating agent of their social ties.

### **Forgetting War**

By discarding violent events from the idealization of their narratives, people cope with the pain that killings and misfortune may awake. Interviewees never mentioned war or hurtful memories when talking about their lives of before. It was only when I asked specifically about the effects of forced displacement that they talked about bad memories. Only then, did they elaborate on the importance of the works of memory and oblivion. "Memories are always behind you", as some women say. Interviewees affirmed they didn't want to open their wounds every time they were asked about their displacement, but this did not mean that they forgot. Memories of indignities would never cease constituting counter memories against the forgetting of terror. However, they had faith that, for the well-being of their children, these memories of bad events would fade with time from their children's minds. Angela, a very young woman who had just recently given birth to a baby was very

depressed and told me that she constantly remembered her father and her husband who were killed. According to her, these memories tormented her with a persistent question: why did they kill them?

Yes, one would like to keep going, but it is as if one feels not able to do it, it's as if one does not want to think of those things of the past, but they are always there, they do not get out from one's thinking. (Woman, 17 years old, from Granada, Antioquia)<sup>76</sup>

Breaks, voids, and gaps in people's narratives that Paul Ricoeur (2004) calls "wounds of memory" can also be verbalized as not knowing, a literal lack of consciousness, not realizing how exactly all the tragic event related to their eviction happened. It is as if they were not conscious when they witnessed the events. When I asked Gloria about the events of her displacement two years ago, she said that she had lost her consciousness when she witnessed the killing of her husband:

Q: Do you know something about your neighbors that stayed behind you?

A: I guess that's sad because some got out and fled too. Those who were closer to us went out behind [us] but I did not realize when I got out of my house. I did not realize when I arrived in town. No nothing. I totally lost. It is as if I was gone that day. I don't know. It is because I did not realize. (Woman 50 years old from Granada, Antioquia).<sup>77</sup>

Memories of a beautiful place of before contrast with painful memories of violence and fear. Through Silence around distressing experiences interviewees avoided pain or their children's future feelings of revenge. Somehow they postponed memories they did not want to stain while remembering the good times. Interviewees select their ideal memories as

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<sup>76</sup> Si como que uno quiere seguir, pero como que no es capaz, como que uno no quiere pensar en esas cosas del pasado pero siempre están ahí, es que no se le salen a uno del pensamiento.

<sup>77</sup> -Usted sabe cómo se quedaron los vecinos que iban detrás de usted?

-Me imagino que tristes y es que unos salieron y se fueron también, los más cerca, salieron más atrasito, pues yo me dí cuenta hasta cuando salí de la casa *yo no me dí cuenta ni cuando llegué al pueblo ni nada, yo totalmente perdí, como que me fui ese día, no sé, es que no me dí cuenta.*

symbolic denials of war and present them as morally valued places, moral templates upon which they want to rebuild their lives anew.

### **Mementoes in Practices of Resettlement**

People mentioned items, personal mementoes and cherished objects they had saved as part of their coping practices after displacement. There are multiple ways in which these possessions were used to face displacement as well as to negotiate and claim their positions against the discrimination they have faced while arriving to the city. They managed to include some expensive machines they owned such as electrical saws and generators as valuable objects they could sell or pawn in the city if they needed to survive or to pay rent for a few days. Luz Estela, for example, recovered the T.V she had to pawn to be able to pay the tuition of her son. It has an enormous value for her because she managed to have this T.V sent from her hometown:

I called the Secretary of Education to see if they could give me a place for my children because I did not have money, but no, they did not comply. It was then that I had to pawn the T.V...to go and pay my son's tuition thanks to a lady that I was washing, washing, and washing [her clothes] could I get the TV back because I was feeling very sad to lose it because it is part of my life there, because after we arrived here I had that TV delivered here (...) There are things that are very important for me and I cannot just get rid of them all of a sudden. (Woman 32 years old from Tumaco, Nariño).<sup>78</sup>

After displacement, Afro-Colombian women used gold or family relics as savings in case of illness or to cover medical care. In the Pacific Coast every woman is supposed to have her *alhajas* and wear them to be protected against misfortune. Many of them like

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<sup>78</sup> Llamé a la Secretaría de Educación para ver si me daban un cupo para los niños porque no tenía plata y no, no cedieron y ahí fue que a mí me tocó empeñar el televisor... ir a matricularlo y gracias a una señora que yo estaba lávele, lávele y lávele y lávele pude sacar el televisor porque me da tanta tristeza perderlo porque hace parte de mi vida allá, porque después de que llegamos aquí yo mandé traer ese televisor acá (...) son cosas que son muy importantes para mí y no puedo salir de ellas de la noche a la mañana.

Myriam have used this gold to cover the costs of their travel that brought them to the city and to survive for several months:

And we used to have the... the jewels, that here they call gold. We over there call jewels the gold, in other words we have rings, chains, earrings, everybody this is normal that everybody has them; because it is like

A: Is this for good luck or what?

M: No, it is like you are investing the money. Over there there are no banks so it is like one invests the money...as you are having the possibilities of that.

Because one does not know in which moment (...) Since one does not have insurance in the countryside, because over there there was none of that, you do not know in what moment you can get sick.

A: Sure

M: Over there you don't go the doctor when you are seriously ill. One says I sell this, I sell this chain, I sell the rings. And it is like an investment that one... (Woman 48 years old from Salaquí, Chocó).<sup>79</sup>

Some others have saved carefully the school papers and birth certificates of their children, certificates of the courses they have done, and letters of recommendation from their previous patrons, the priest or the mayor of the town, the president of the *Junta de Acción Comunal* because, as they say, "in the city you have to be referred to someone or to know someone to get a job." Some always carry from one office to the other their *papelería*, important piles of papers related to their properties, proving they are owners or possessors of their lands.

Wherever he went, Don Ricardo carried the photographs of the farm he owned. He was showing them to me as evidence of the several crops of his land, but also proof that he

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<sup>79</sup> M: Y... y uno acostumbra a tener las... las alhajas, que aquí llaman oro. Uno por allá llama alhajas al oro, o sea que uno tiene sus anillos, sus cadenas, aretes, todo el mundo eso es normal que... todo el mundo lo tenga; porque como que...

A: ¿Eso es de buena suerte o que?

M: No es que como que uno invierte la plata. Allá no existen los bancos entonces como que uno invierte la plata... a medida que va teniendo sus posibilidades en eso. Porque no sabe uno en que momento. Como uno en el campo no tiene seguro ni nada de eso, porque por allá no existía nada de eso, entonces uno no sabe en qué momento se puede enfermar

A: Claro

M: y uno por allá no va al médico y una enfermedad grave uno, dice vendo esto, vendo esta cadena, vendo la... los anillos. Y es como una inversión que uno...



was helping to preserve the sources of water by planting trees and carrying out an ecological project. Images of the cedars and crops give concrete shape to the connection to his past.

Most of the interviewees carefully kept a photograph of a dear member of their family whom they had to leave behind or a member of their families who had been killed or disappeared. The photo stood for absent persons. It was a memorial for those who died or were lost due to family dispersion during flight. Through this carrying of the photographs and through their disposing in family shrines people are commemorating the absent and dead beloved others (Riaño 2000). Doris showed me her mother's photograph that she had carefully attached to a family shrine illuminated by an electrical candle placed next to the bed she shares with her two children:

As for now, thank god they have already erased everything (...) At the beginning when we arrived here she used to cry a lot because she remembered a lot (...) But now it seems that it has been fading away (...) Since I have a photo there, they start to say: -mami, my grandmother, so and so, that mami isn't it true that they have killed my grandmother? Since they saw her laying there, so they remember that way, when they see her in the photo. (Woman 33 years old from Algeciras, Huila)<sup>80</sup>

Others carry with them certificates, diplomas, photographs, and badges as legitimating documents to demonstrate they had a job or a profession. Libia was telling me how she was at the brink of losing her mind because she needed desperately the money to pay the rent and she had no papers to claim aid. The only thing she saved was a little badge where it said she was a nurse at the hospital in her home-town and this may at least enabled her to find a job taking care of an old person in Bogotá.

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<sup>80</sup> Pues hasta ahora, gracias a Dios se les ha borrado ya todo (...) al principio cuando llegamos aquí ella lloraba mucho porque ella recordaba mucho (...) Pero a esta fecha ya como que se les va borrando (...) como yo tengo una foto ahí, 'tonces comienzan que mami, que mi abuelita, que mami que no se qué, que mami que no es cierto que a mi abuelita la mataron. Como ellos la vieron ahí tirada, pues ellos que nada me recuerdan eso, pero porque la ven en la foto.

Rita was a woman who had already four years in Bogotá. At the beginning she struggled a lot and had to live apart from her two daughters lodged temporarily in a convent. Later she succeeded to set up her own food business selling tamales and was able to reunite with her daughters, bought a small house and paid her daughters' school fees. When I asked her which kind of documents she had brought she enumerated a list demonstrating her permanent willingness to enroll in any available training course to keep working on his business:

[Dona Rita is showing me her diplomas]

A: Tell me where are these from, what courses have you done?

R: This is a health diploma "Rural Health Promoter of the Province of Meta"

A: Where did you do this?

R: In Acacias

A: The other one, where did you do it?

R: In Lejanías

A: Meta, also?

R: Yes

A: What was this one on?

R: On health too, basic family health

A: This one, where did you do it?

R: In the SENA<sup>81</sup>

A: And on what?

R: Business administration, retailing.

A: And the other?

R: From Progresar too and I made it by this time one year ago

A: And this one is on what?

R: It is about managing...social business reestablishment.

(Woman, 50 years old, from Lejanías, Meta).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> SENA: Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, National Service of Learning

<sup>82</sup> Dona Rita, usted me estaba mostrando sus diplomas

A: Cuénteme de dónde son, qué ha hecho cursos?

R: este diploma es de salud

"Promotora rural de salud del Departamento del Meta"

A: En dónde hizo éste?

R: En Acacias

A: El otro dónde lo hizo?

R: En Lejanías

A: Meta también?

R: También

A: Ese sobre qué?

R: Sobre salud también, salud básica familiar

A: Este dónde lo hizo?

R: En el SENA

A: Es sobre qué?

Possessions and especially documents in the case of Rita are used as accounts of personal experience as well vehicles of biographical experience that she thinks has help her to find support in the city. Saved material artifacts are part of a willingness to project a particular image of personal goals and aspirations.

Internally displaced lack of resources in the city contrasts with the image of plenty they provide about their pasts. This discrepancy between an imagined place of before full of resources and a present place of scarcity and hardship increase their sense of dispossession and destitution.

Interviewees complain their dependence on cash in the city. Back home interviewees said that mobility and access to food and shelter were not mediated through cash. Many said that they did not pay transportation to move or they were lodged and fed by family or friends and get food through networks of reciprocity and ties of obligation while traveling within their region. Women discussed that before they did not have control over cash whereas men that were in charge of selling their crops, running their business or receiving a labor payment had always money in their pockets. In the city, they find themselves in the inverse situation: men are not able to have cash and their new situation of absolute dependency is interpreted as a sudden and radical move down in their lives. In contrast women after displacement use ingenious ways to save money by bartering groceries and items with friends, making extra money washing clothes or offering small services to their neighbors, and identifying the cheapest places in the city to buy their groceries.

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R: administración de negocios detallista

A: Y el otro?

R: de Progresar también y lo hice por esta época del año pasado.

A: Y es sobre qué?

R: Del manejo ... restablecimiento social empresarial

In the city they need to keep up with new practices of consumption related to their appearance and new conventions of presentation in public if they want to dismantle the idea that internally displaced people are poor and beggars. For instance, sending the children with uniforms and school supplies is a requirement imposed by the schools that they often cannot meet but that they strive to do so to avoid practices of discrimination against their children. Having to spend money they don't have for expensive school supplies was mentioned as a particularly worrying issue:

- Why don't you receive my children with the stuff that they bring? Come on! That they have to go with the uniforms and with all the books and the sport pants and the white sneakers. Well all this a whole bunch of requirements... (woman, 32 years old from Tumaco, Narino).<sup>83</sup>

Cherished possessions and items people were able to save were used as protective sources of money when they feel in dire need of cash in the city. While entering the new order of social conventions and requirements in terms of consumption and appearance people feel emplaced within marginalized social positions that contrast with narratives that stress a former and lost social context and standing.

## **Conclusion**

Through narratives about richness and happiness of an ideal before people reclaim former homelands and dismantle the pervasive logic of hegemonic stereotyped ideas that emplace people to backward and isolated places. Internally displaced people consider that it is important to explain and retell their pasts to oppose the countless and powerful negative images commonly held about "war-torn places of origin." Through the telling of stories about

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<sup>83</sup> - ¿por qué no me reciben los niños, con las cosas que ellos traen? por favor! que tenían que ir con los uniformes y con todos los libros y la sudadera y tenis blancos. Bueno eso un poco de requisitos...

their former place, its landscape, 'nature', 'freedom', 'open spaces', family and friends' visits, abundance of food, the maintenance of social links and familiar chores, people I interviewed claim to be positioned as people with social standing. By using the few things they could save, acquiring gradually the possessions they want to recover, and getting attuned to the new regimes of value and appearance, internally displaced reaffirm their dignity and refuse to accept the situation of displacement as permanent; they believe in some kind of transmutation of the present conditions of duress and oppose the prevailing discourses on forced displacement and humanitarian assistance.

## Chapter 4

### From Struggles over Land to the Politics of Ethnicity

In order to understand the agrarian history of peasant and ethnic Colombian movements and their struggles over lands, I will trace their shifts from political claims connected to the Colombian peasantry to claims recently link to issues of ethnicity. The 1991 Constitution reshaped the notion of diversity in Colombia. Using the research of experts in ethnicity in Colombia, I will show how the three ethnic categories used to identify otherness in Colombia (indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and *campesinos*) have changed from indexes of discrimination to important political markers to shape new forms of ethnic citizenship.

I use scholar research undertaken in Colombia in this topic, interviews with leaders of these movements as well as the literature that these organizations have published on their web pages to analyze how ethnic organizations have recently incorporated the issue of forced displacement as a key topic within their political agenda. These organizations refer to forced displacement as a crime of war against culture, place, and nature drawing on global discourses of multiculturalism, environmentalism, and anti-neoliberalism.

In the second part of this chapter, I use the material collected during the workshops I organized with indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders to analyze the discursive formations that their organizations have built around forced displacement. I complement the information gathered during the workshops with recent scholar work to unravel the use of particular strategic and essential discourses around “culture.” Ethnic organizations assisting displaced leaders have undertaken an intense work of reconstruction of their groups’ social memory,

following the mandates of the 1991 Constitution and the laws concerning territorial rights. This explains why the participants of my workshops insisted in remembering their homelands and asserting cultural and spiritual wealth. Only by showing their communities as territorially anchored ones can these organizations claim accountability and political recognition from national and international audiences.

Indigenous leaders I interviewed affirmed that they were spiritually connected to their territories and were culturally ecological protectors of nature. New constitutional rights had made them the owners of highly-valued lands in terms of natural resources and biodiversity. Therefore, indigenous groups affirmed that the current forced displacement was a global technique of power used to extract and sell their territories' wealth. I illustrated indigenous assertions on territorial rights through two cases: first, the case of Kankuamo displaced indigenous people who escaped the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and led a movement of spiritual recovery of the tradition in Bogotá. Second, the case of the Pijao community of displaced indigenous that formed an important community of former and recently arrived migrants that had organized to claim a special indigenous jurisdiction within the city of Bogotá.

Afro-Colombians have organized around their own interpretation of displacement, asserting that their goal is to enforce and defend Law 70 of 1993 which granted them collective lands where they say they have been practicing a distinctive culture respectful of nature and based on an alternative concept of development and peace. They believe that they are expelled as part of an old macro plan traced to exploit and integrate the Colombian Bio-Pacific into the global market. To illustrate the very recent Afro-Colombian mobilization over land entitlements and rights I take two cases: the case of the Riosucio, a town located in

the North of the province of Chocó that was literally wiped out by military campaigns and subsequent paramilitary massacres. From exile, Riosucio households have denounced globally the invasion of their collective lands by the presence of oil-palm corporations. The second case tells the story of two women leaders from Barbacoas, Nariño who have opposed the presence of timber corporations in their territories and have been victims of several persecutions.

### **Ethnicity and the 1991 Constitution in Colombia**

A deeply entrenched belief that subordinated classes, including black and indigenous groups, were inferior has marked the history of racism in Colombia from colonial times. During the colony and up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the political elites openly manifested scorn for *lo indio* (indianness) or *lo negro* (blackness). Practices of miscegenation, specifically whitening, supported individual promotion and acquisition of status to overcome the virulent practices of exclusion based on racial and class differences. After independence, and during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, upward social mobility was only possible by getting socially, culturally or physically closer to the relatively powerful well-off elites claiming to be the holders of Spanish values. After independence, these racial distinctions were to be erased and replaced with the fusion of Spanish, Indian and Black cultural heritages giving birth to a new national identity. To legitimate Colombian nationalist territorial ideology, a sense of kinship –shared blood- among those who legitimately make up the nation” was necessary (Sawyer 2004:34). *Colombians* or the less frequently used term *mestizos* have been the terms to indicate that unity prevailed over diversity within a nation-building project of national citizens. Indigenous were compelled to live in special jurisdictions (*resguardos*) whereas



Afro-Colombians were invisible as minorities, yet discriminated by their color. Notions of nation and ethnicity were gendered. National identity was promoted through patriotism imagined as a natural depository of integrity, roots, pride, health and courage all emanating from a strong attachment to the land and the inheritance of Spaniard macho qualities.

Surprisingly, discourses of race and ethnicity were not explicitly expressed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and yet, indigenous and blacks continued to be imagined as inferior and few in numbers but as wild possessors of magical powers. Among the various stereotypes that have operated until very recently to define and situate ethnic minorities in Colombia, indigenous people were thought of as irrational but powerful shamans, and blacks were thought of as magical, lazy, and backward but good musicians and lovers. However, racism or any reference to it was denied by political elites. Up until 1991, there was an avoidance of talk about race and class categories were used instead to express prejudice (Cunin 2004). Minorities were invisible in the social and political arena and racist practices were denied. The lack of racial categories to identify otherness was used to argue that there was no racism, while racial prejudices combined with class barriers was a subtle but virulent hierarchical way to classify and dominate social groups in Colombia.

The 1991 Constitution challenged radically these institutionalized practices of discrimination and prejudice by declaring Colombia ethnically and culturally plural. Since then, cultural rights of ethnic minorities have been recognized in Colombia. State, experts, and social movements' discourses of ethnicity and identity began to bloom and overlap. The social movements that joined the political movement around the new constitution incorporated multiculturalism to talk about the contribution of diverse cultures to the building of the nation-state. They drew on the civic discourse of leftist parties of the 1970s, the

academic discourse of the 1980s showing that black and indigenous communities were culturally distinct and good preservers of their environment, and the development discourse of planners reinterpreted by the newly empowered organizations as a “community-inspired development”.

Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups were invented and redefined in essential terms as ‘traditional’ and deeply rooted in their ancestral lands by the 1991 Constitution (Wade 2004). In the meantime, by marking who was ethnic the Colombian dominant sector erased its own ethnic background and kept the illusion that they did not need to assert any identity claim of difference to demonstrate their ‘natural’ membership to *la patria*. Article 2 Decree 2164 of 1995 defines an indigenous community as:

The group or group of families of Amerindian descent who have consciousness of their identity and share values, traits, uses and customs. They have their own forms of government, social control, and normative systems that distinguish them from other communities. [This decree includes] communities that do not hold property titles accrediting them legally and communities whose *resguardos* have been dissolved, divided or declared vacant.<sup>84</sup>

Law 70 1993, and specifically its article 55, recognizes collective property rights for black communities defined as traditional communities living on state-owned lands in the riverine zones of the Pacific basin and sharing a history of sustainable systems of production including agricultural activities, forest extraction activities, hunting, fishing and recollection of natural products, and mine techniques (Grueso 2000:76). The constitutional article provides the following definition:

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<sup>84</sup> Comunidad o Parcialidad Indígena. Es el grupo o conjunto de familias, de ascendencia amerindia, que tienen conciencia de identidad y comparten valores, rasgos, usos o costumbres de su cultura, así como formas de gobierno, gestión, control social o sistemas normativos propios que las distinguen de otras comunidades, tengan o no títulos de propiedad, o que no puedan acreditarlos legalmente o que sus resguardos fueron disueltos, divididos o declarados vacantes. This decree partially regulates Chapter XIV of Law 160, 1994 concerning the entitlement of lands to indigenous communities to constitute, extend and re-structure indigenous resguardos in Colombia.

Black Community is the group of families of Afro-Colombian descent who have their own culture, share a history and have their own traditions and customs within a relation countryside-village. [Black communities] reveal and preserve an identity consciousness that distinguish them from other ethnic groups.<sup>85</sup>

As part of the movement of the 1991 Constitution, indigenous groups as well as Afro-Colombians started a process of intense cultural reinvigoration. They strove to fit the above-mentioned definitions by reinventing utopian projects of cultural recovery through a rediscovery of “tradition.” Indigenous people and black communities realized that ancestral “authentic” practices were important new indexes of state recognition that implied crucial cultural rights (rights to land, legal and political autonomy). They adopted what some authors call a “strategic essentialism” (Jackson 2002) or practices aimed at a reinvention of tradition. Some indigenous groups started to make censuses in which they carefully chose indigenous family names, teased out cosmology from precarious cultural referents, and organized ceremonies to legitimate *cabildos*, created emblems, recovered narratives or what they call “legends of origin,” and elaborated glossaries with the words of their extinct native languages (Chaves 2003:130).

Similarly, Afro-Colombian organizations based on their new constitutional rights started in the early nineties an intense struggle for their newly acquired lands. Many of them recorded the oral history telling their ancestors’ fleeing from slave plantations and mines and their resettlement in the Pacific forest. They revitalized their music and dancing traditions, recovered traditional medical practices, and demonstrated how they had an ecological management of their environment. They presented themselves as “rural,” “fluvial”, and

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<sup>85</sup> Comunidad negra: es el conjunto de familias de ascendencia afrocolombiana que poseen una cultura propia, comparten una historia y tienen sus propias tradiciones y costumbres dentro de la relación campo-poblado, que revelan y conservan conciencia de identidad que las distingue de otros grupos étnicos (Article 55, law 70, 1993).

“peaceful”, asserting a territorially-anchored identity. They made clear that their strong relationship to their lands was reified not as atavism but as resistance not to give up their newly acquired cultural rights (Agudelo 2004). One leader from PCN, Libia Grueso, has defined Afro-Colombian cultural politics not as “ a rigid defense of tradition but rather a real possibility for building an alternative social reality based on more democratic values, not only among humans but between humans and nature” (Grueso 2005:104).

When people I met through workshops and meetings used the expression “recovery of tradition”, they were not just referring to the defense of ancestral ways of life. They meant the product of a cultural confrontation with the state. Their organizations had used a cultural project toward political ends. When indigenous groups spoke of cultural essences, they were in fact rediscovering cultural potentialities, constantly attempting to appropriate new ideas and conceptual models. For example, indigenous leaders made strategic assertions of cultural purity and at the same time allow the heterogeneous character of their communities that included the active participation of non-native activists, *colaboradores* and occasional supporters (Rappaport 2005).

Indigenous and Afro-Colombian organizations reinterpreted the notion of culture as a political project of counter modernity through which they could protect themselves from the new forms of domination of the current processes of globalization by asserting cultural difference and legal and political autonomy. As one indigenous leader puts it:

Resistance is not only to hide. It means to guarantee that we are going to consolidate our government, to be with the *compañeros* in their sorrow. It is the defense of our government, our law. It is the defense of the tradition.<sup>86</sup> (ONIC male *solidario* 40 years old)

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<sup>86</sup> Resistencia no sólo esconderse, es garantizar que vamos consolidar nuestro gobierno, acompañar a los compañeros en el dolor. Es la defensa del gobierno, es la defensa de la ley, es la defensa de la tradición.

In other words, the main political agenda of ethnic groups has been the defense of their constitutional rights that have granted them lands, political and cultural autonomy. Since 1995 forced displacement has thwarted these processes of territorial entitlements and cultural autonomy. As a response Afro-Colombian movements have initiated an intense campaign against war. For state officials, though, the belligerency of internally displaced ethnic groups claiming state recognition has become disquieting. Jurisdictional claims of autonomy become disturbing demands: some groups do not meet constitutional standards that define ethnic groups and yet, in some aspects, they meet parts of the state definitions. The Colombian state set the standards of authenticity and decides who meets those standards. In the case of the Special Indigenous Jurisdiction, only those communities that exhibit full and coherent recognizably cultural traits can apply to have their own *cabildo* in the city and practice customary law.

Although the purpose of the 1991 constitutional reform was to counterbalance the centuries-old disdain that the national state and dominant society had for indigenous knowledge and modes of thought, its definitions ended up naturalizing cultural difference as deeply rooted (Wade 2004). Furthermore, following discourses on multiculturalism, national authorities and official representatives celebrate cultural diversity conveying a nationalist, folkloric and harmonious image of a culturally diverse country while failing to see contemporary ethnic communities as equally modern citizens. Indigenous organizations and black communities have carried out a politics of difference to counter this folkloric image of national diversity (Nelson 1996) while claiming their entitlement to their new constitutional special rights.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> These special rights include:

- Right to preserve their integrity and cultural patrimony (Articles 2, 7, 10, 58, 63, 72, 79, 248)

Although Afro-Colombians and indigenous people share with most of *campesino* populations their main activities and occupations, peasant *mestizo* movements felt that the 1991 Constitution left them outside of the special protection that ethnic minorities gained (Salgado and Prada 2000). Rural workers who haven't joined ethnic movements and consider themselves *campesinos*, as well as those urban populations who are poor and have a dubious ethnic affiliation, felt they did not qualify for special cultural rights. In a similar way, those who did not feel identified with essential and idealized racial distinctions could not claim place in terms of the new legislation on cultural difference. Furthermore, the state has permanently associated peasants with backward agricultural production forms and a frozen identity reducing them to small, closed communities practicing predatory agricultural practices (Salgado and Prada 2000).

The 1991 Constitution in Colombia attempted to break old representations and socio-racial stratifications inherited from colonial times. However, the Colombian state has been using these new essential and territorially rooted definitions of ethnical groups to prove its new multicultural character while endorsing the same old arbitrary practices such as forced displacement to expropriate ethnic groups' territories. The history of Colombian social movements that I will present in the next section will show clearly their opposition to an arbitrary land tenure system adopting gradually the new discourse of ethnic cultural difference. The adoption of this new discourse define the ways these movements talk about

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- Right to participate in public affairs and decide their own future (Articles 1, 2, 40, 41, 49, 286, 287, 329, 330, and transitory 55)
  - Right to the state assistance to protect their life, culture, and environment of their territories (Articles 79, 330, and transitory 55).
  - Right to preserve their own judicial and social institutions (Articles 7,8,70,246,330, and transitory 55)
  - Right to land and natural resources (Articles 63, 286, 329, 330, and transitory 55)
  - Right to health and social security (Article 44, 48, 49, 50, 64, and 366)
  - Right to an education according to their culture (Articles 67, 68, 69, and 70)
- (Ng'weno 2000:18)

place and territory and their positions *vis-à-vis* the recent forced displacement that has particularly affected them. There is indeed a historical shift in the political agenda of ethnic movements in Colombia: they have moved from an old struggle over lands where class issues were central towards a radical cultural discourse that includes the defense of human, cultural and environmental rights and their opposition to war within their territories.

### **History of Colombian Agrarian Movements**

Indigenous collective practices of defense of communal lands called *resguardos* can be traced back to colonial times. *Resguardos* was the name given to indigenous political and traditional territorial units. They were communally owned lands granted to the communities by the Spanish crown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Law 89 of 1890 provided indigenous people with the right to have their own authorities, government, and legal representation. It established an administrative procedure to recover colonial *resguardo* titles lost due to violence and dispossession. Finally this law recognized the communal character of indigenous territories and their semi-autonomous local councils called *cabildos*. However, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, indigenous lands were continually usurped from *resguardos* and privatized in a process called *parcelación*.

Under the system of landownership that prevailed throughout the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, peasant, indigenous and black rural workers were incorporated into big haciendas as wage-laborers, tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Landowners expanded their haciendas and turned them into commercial landholdings by hiring workers who received small subsistence plots in exchange for clearing the forest, sowing plots of grasses, and tending cattle (Zamosc 1989). Strong left regional organizations and unions of rural and urban workers like the

Federación Campesina e indígena<sup>88</sup>, opposed this expansion of haciendas. They formulated their claims as a class struggle and fought for the enforcement of Law 200 of 1936, a law that punished the holding of vast abandoned or unproductive lands through expropriation.

But it was not until 1961 that an agrarian reform law (Law 135) was passed with ambitious aims of land redistribution to rural workers, including indigenous and black peasants. However, the primary focus of land reform was colonization and not redistribution despite the creation of the INCORA and the ANUC<sup>89</sup>, two institutions in charge of assisting rural workers to implement the reform at the county and departmental levels. Through the training of hundreds of leaders, INCORA assigned parcels for individual family subsistence, reserving the rest of the area for commercial production. This system was called *empresa comunitaria* (community enterprise) administered collectively by members of the ANUC. Through directed relocation programs, INCORA resettled displaced populations from places affected by *La Violencia* to “areas of colonization.” Following this reform, many landowners launched a campaign of evictions. Radical sectors of ANUC activists opposed these acts through a national mobilization using land invasions as their main technique of resistance. Benefiting from the support of INCORA, peasant movements successfully retained control of the lands they had fought for in the late 1960s. Guerrilla groups backed these movements of spontaneous colonization that transformed agrarian reality throughout the Amazon basin (Zamosc 1989).

However, this agrarian reform was reversed in 1972 when the government decided to provide support for capitalist agriculture as part of the Green Revolution. The idea was to eradicate “anti-economic systems of rural exploitation” including indigenous *resguardos* and

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<sup>88</sup> Peasant and Indigenous Federation

<sup>89</sup> Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, National Association of Peasant Users



small rural holdings that were considered retrograde forms of land-tenure. The state created the DRI<sup>90</sup> program to provide credit, services, and technical assistance to the better-off sectors of the peasantry. Severe cuts in INCORA's budget affected small agriculturalists who were forced to work on occasional wage-labor and seasonal migrations mainly in cattle-ranging.

Indigenous people often joined *campesinos* in their invasions of lands, but soon they discovered that their own ethnic organizational efforts were more successful at integrating recovered lands into the *resguardo* as well as in reconstituting indigenous political authorities. They differentiated their claims from the peasant movements not wanting to be seen as peasants. One indigenous leader coming from the Zenú area explained during one of the workshop I organized, the peasant origins of the indigenous movements in the North-Eastern part of Colombia:

Before, around 1975 until 1980, we, indigenous people, had organized as peasants. But the indigenous organization started more or less around the eighties. The first *cabildos* were formed between 1982 and 1983. We started with an only goal called recovery of land in good or in bad terms. We organized and worked to re-structure cabildos and up until this date we have acquired 35.000 hectares of land recovered. In addition in this fight, which has been pure fight, we have around fifty leaders assassinated, other leaders threatened, others uprooted, others displaced.<sup>91</sup>

In the early 1970s and through the creation of the CRIC<sup>92</sup>, several local indigenous organizations were able to take part in national politics. Indigenous people gained entrance into national universities and became activists as well as scholars engaged in strong processes of cultural recovery. Some former assimilated indigenous groups became “Indians”

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<sup>90</sup> Desarrollo Rural Integrado, Integrated Rural Development

<sup>91</sup> Antes como del 75 al 80 indígenas se habían organizado como campesinos. Pero la organización indígena comenzó más o menos como en los ochenta. Los primeros cabildos se organizaron del 82 al 83. Se comienza con un solo objetivo que se llama recuperación de la tierra a las buenas o a las malas. Nos organizamos y echamos a reestructurar cabildos y es la fecha en que tenemos 35.000 hectareas de tierra recuperadas. Como de ñapa en esta lucha, que es lucha pura, tenemos como 50 líderes asesinados y otros amenazados y otros desterrados y otros desplazados.

<sup>92</sup> Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca

again. During the 1980s, these different regional organizations finally developed a common agenda, creating the ONIC in 1982.

During the 1970s and 1980s, ethnicity also acquired saliency for black urban students inspired by international movements against segregation and racism, like the ones led by MalcolmX, Franz Fanon, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. The movement called *Cimarrón*, created in 1982, carried out community work through “ecclesiastic movement basis” supported by the Afro-Colombian social pastoral of the Catholic church of the province of Chocó.

A strong bond between the above-mentioned urban black founders of grass-root organizations and the left sectors of the Catholic Church marked the origins of Afro-Colombian movements. Inspired by Liberation Theology, the Dioceses of Quibdó in the Province of Chocó and its missionary work had a long-lasting legacy of development programs implemented with the Afro-Colombian peasantry. In the north of the province of Chocó, the COCOMACIA<sup>93</sup> drew on important scholarly research carried out during the 1980s (Friedemann 1984, Friedemann and Arocha 1986) and adopted the notion of “Africanness,” reinterpreting it as “the root of the feelings of Afro-Colombian people.” They created the, ACABA<sup>94</sup>, intending to rewrite the national history that had made them invisible socially and dismantling the demeaning Andean stereotypes that perceived them as poor and populations with primordial identities. They asserted the need to recover their history of resistance so that their cultural contribution to the Colombian nation-building process would not fall into oblivion (*Cimarrón* and *Cocomacia* web pages).

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<sup>93</sup> Consejo Comunitario de la Asociación de Campesinos Integrales del Atrato, Community Council of the Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato River

<sup>94</sup> Asociación Campesina del Baudó, Peasant Association of Baudó

In the meantime, organizations of *mestizo* rural workers formed networks<sup>95</sup> as well as alliances with civic and ethnic regional movements and new parties of the left, such as the Unión Patriótica political party (UP). Civic strikes, take-overs, protest marches, road blockades, occupations of city halls and INCORA offices, gathered rural laborers, urban unemployed, as well as unionists to demand land, credit, services, and rights equal to those of the landowners.

During the 1980s, the expansion of the big landownership by the drug cartels and the dirty war aimed at exterminating leaders and promoters from the UP resulted in a radical decline of these peasant movements. Some communities reacted through protest and marches, like the march of San José del Guaviare in 1987. Some other members of the peasant movements decided to form NGOs, resulting in a notable decline in the strength of the protests. Through Law 160 of 1994, the state recognized the so-called *Reservas Campesinas* and defined them as organized communities of *colonos* destined to promote and stabilize peasant economies in public lands (Fajardo 2002). In 1996, various peasant sectors working in the production of coca in the Amazon region of Caquetá organized the peasant marches of *cocaleros* documented by María Clemencia Ramírez (2001) to oppose the controls on the commercialization of the products used for the processing of coca leaves. The *cocalero* movement demanded similar protection to the one granted to ethnic communities: access to lands, protection for their lives, credits and technical assistance for the production and commercialization of their activities. The Consejo Nacional Campesino<sup>96</sup>, composed of departmental and regional peasant councils, as well as the Asociación Nacional para la

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<sup>95</sup>ANUC-UR: Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos- Unidad y reconstrucción, National Association of Peasant Users-Unity and Reconstruction; ANMUCIC Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas e Indígenas de Colombia, National Association of Peasant and Indigenous Womans From Colombia; FENSUAGRO Federación Nacional Agropecuaria de Colombia, Agricultural National Federation of Colombia

<sup>96</sup> Peasant National Council

Salvación Agropecuaria de Colombia<sup>97</sup> opposed neo-liberal policies and the free trade treaty between Colombia and the US (Mondragón 2002). Although weaker than the indigenous and black organizations, Colombian peasant movements have unified their claims and established international alliances to form blocks against neo-liberal reforms throughout the continent. FENSUAGRO and ANUR-UR became affiliates of the international peasant movement called Vía Campesina<sup>98</sup> that gathers organizations from all over the world to mobilize against the privatization of resources and the neo-liberal policies signed in meetings such as the World Organization of Commerce, the World Bank and the free trade treaties meetings (Mondragón 2002).

After the 1991 Constitution, the efflorescence of indigenous activism marked a turning point in their goals, from a recovery of land to a struggle for local political power. They started working towards a new way of doing politics, moving from the *politiquería* (the name given to corrupt and clientelist *mestizo* traditional political practices) to a new ethnic citizenship that included autonomy in the administration of justice and control of territory. Articles 171 and 176 of the 1991 Constitution that determine political indigenous participation in the Senate and Congress, article 246 regarding special indigenous jurisdiction, and article 286 that defines indigenous territorial entities will represent the basis for a renewed indigenous political power.

Defined as part of the national justice system, the “Special Indigenous Jurisdiction” has enabled them to punish the members of their communities according to their customary law:

The Special Indigenous Jurisdiction is the constitutional faculty given to indigenous authorities to administer justice in all the domains of law in autonomous, independent

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<sup>97</sup> National Association to Rescue Colombian Agriculture

<sup>98</sup> Peasant Way

and integral ways according to ancestral uses and customs and their own norms and procedures and to the special indigenous legislation enforced within their territorial domains.<sup>99</sup> (Arbeláez 2004:27)

Law 270 of 1996 has determined that official indigenous authorities (*cabildos*) can replace the judges in investigations and legal decisions within indigenous territories under the control and supervision of national legal authorities in charge of ensuring that these norms and procedures do not contradict the 1991 Constitution or the national legal system.

Although subordinated to the control of national judicial authorities, the indigenous special jurisdiction still represents a big judicial autonomy given to indigenous authorities:

Authorities of the indigenous territories foreseen by law exert their judicial functions only within the realm of their territories and according to their own norms and procedures that cannot contradict the Constitution or the national laws. National law will establish the authorities that will exert control over the constitutional and legal character of the acts uttered by these indigenous authorities.<sup>100</sup> (Article 246, Law 270 of 1996)

In terms of control over territory, the constitutional norms regarding the ordering of the national territory and specifically Article 330 (not yet implemented) creates the new Indigenous Territorial Entities with administrative autonomy and their own budget. *Cabildos* would rule these territorial entities according to indigenous cultural practices as stated by this article:

According to the Constitution and its laws, indigenous territories will be ruled by councils constituted and regulated according to the indigenous communities' uses and customs and will have the following functions:

1. To observe the application of the legal norms related to the use of land and the populating of their territories.
2. To design economic and social development policies, plans and programs according to the Development National Plan.

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<sup>99</sup> Jurisdicción especial indígena: es la facultad constitucional de las autoridades indígenas de administrar justicia en todas las ramas del derecho, en forma autónoma, integral e independiente de acuerdo con los usos y costumbres ancestrales, las normas y procedimientos propios y la legislación indígena especial vigente dentro de su ámbito territorial.

<sup>100</sup> Las autoridades de los pueblos indígenas podrán ejercer funciones jurisdiccionales dentro su ámbito territorial, de conformidad con sus propias normas y procedimientos, siempre que no sean contrarios a la Constitución y las leyes República. La ley establecerá las formas de coordinación de esta jurisdicción especial con el sistema judicial nacional.

3. To promote public investments in their territories and to observe their appropriate execution.
4. To collect and allocate the territories' resources
5. To observe the preservation of natural resources
6. To coordinate the programs and projects that the different communities promote within their territories.
7. To contribute to the maintenance of the public order within their territories according to the National government's instructions and dispositions.
8. To represent their territories before the National government and any other entity to which they will be integrated.
9. Any other function that the Constitution and the law dictate.

Paragraph: the exploitation of natural resources within indigenous territories will be carried out without jeopardizing the cultural, social and economic integrity of the indigenous communities. The government will propitiate the participation of the representatives of the communities affected in the decisions taken regarding this exploitation. <sup>101</sup> (Article 330, 1991 Colombian Constitution)

Since 1991, indigenous movements have undertaken a politics of ethnicity based on their relations to the state laws and definitions and drawing on an old anthropological concept of a coherent and bounded shared culture. Through a positive deployment of ethnic difference and through alliances established with urban progressive sectors of Colombian society, indigenous movements propose an alternative politics. Non-indigenous cadres such as *colaboradores*, and *solidarios* have played a key role in the current insertion of the indigenous movement into the broader Colombian political arena (Rappaport 2005). These

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<sup>101</sup> Artículo 330: de conformidad con la Constitución y las leyes, los territorios indígenas estarán gobernados por consejos conformados y reglamentados según los usos y costumbres de sus comunidades y ejercerán las siguientes funciones:

1. Velar por la aplicación de las normas legales sobre usos del suelo y poblamiento de sus territorios.
2. Diseñar las políticas y los planes y programas de desarrollo económico y social dentro de su territorio, en armonía con el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo.
3. Promover las inversiones públicas en sus territorios y velar por su debida ejecución.
4. Percibir y distribuir sus recursos.
5. Velar por la preservación de los recursos naturales.
6. Coordinar los programas y proyectos promovidos por las diferentes comunidades en su territorio.
7. Colaborar con el mantenimiento del orden público dentro de su territorio de acuerdo con las instrucciones y disposiciones del Gobierno Nacional.
8. Representar a los territorios ante el Gobierno Nacional y las demás entidades a las cuales se integren; y
9. Las que les señalen la Constitución y la ley.

Parágrafo: la explotación de los recursos naturales en los territorios indígenas se hará sin desmedro de la integridad cultural, social y económica de las comunidades indígenas. En las decisiones que se adopten respecto de dicha explotación, el Gobierno propiciará la participación de los representantes de las respectivas comunidades.

are external agents such as non-indigenous experts, members of international organizations, activists, professionals and students working for indigenous organizations. The political pluralism of indigenous movement is based on the belief that tolerance, coexistence and equality can be achieved only by “acting from within their own culture” and “thinking from their own hearts” (Rappaport 2005:18)

Today, Colombian indigenous movements form, at a national level, a complex interethnic network, with a pan-indigenous political agenda that aims at resisting neo-liberal policies regarding the exploitation of natural resources located within their territories and the property rights they claim to have over cultural knowledge on plants and animals. At the transnational level, they receive support from international human-rights organizations and they have participated actively in the World Social Forums. Moreover, by presenting themselves as “ecological” they have promoted the idea that they possess knowledge of alternative and sustainable forms of development (Ulloa 2005).

In the last five years, indigenous movements have also resisted war. In 2001 the OPIAC<sup>102</sup> sued the state for the aerial spraying fumigation in their *resguardos*, charging that it threatened their right to a healthy environment, health, and food security. In September 2004, 60,000 indigenous people coming from different municipalities of the southwestern part of the country, holding and using their staffs of office as symbols of peaceful resistance, organized a march along the Panamerican highway. Year after year since 2002, indigenous guards (*guardia indígena*) have coordinated this main road blockage, and formed an unarmed indigenous army to keep armed groups at bay. In 2004 and 2005, they demanded the liberation of the mayor of the town of Toribío Arquímedes Vitonás and four other leaders of

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<sup>102</sup> Organización de Personas Indígenas del Amazonas Colombiano, Organization of Indigenous People of the Amazon

the Nasa community, and they opposed the Free Trade Agreement currently under negotiation with the US (*El tiempo*, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004:1-10). They declared themselves in a permanent *Minga* for life, justice, happiness, autonomy and freedom of mobilization” stating the need to have a say in relation to peace, territorial ordering, agrarian reforms, development plans and the right to decide about the kind of society they want to build (ONIC 2003:62).

Trained in the leftist movements, indigenous leaders have become cosmopolitan leaders with a sharp and sophisticated critique of western notions of democracy, citizenship and development. Once perceived as economically and socially backward, today they are seen as respected political actors. Although Colombian indigenous populations constitute a tiny minority in demographic numbers (only 2% of the population), they have gained a relatively important role in the national political arena, with two seats in the Senate, and they have persuaded some sectors of the state to support ethno-education programs in their *resguardos*.

In the case of Afro-Colombians movements, there was also an explosion of hundreds of small organizations<sup>103</sup> after 1991. These have worked intensely on the scope and implementation of Law 70 of 1993. Urban Afro-Colombian sectors, as well as members of the peasant movements of the province of Chocó, have worked hand in hand with their communities on issues of territory, traditional forms of production, control over natural resources, and development. To receive the collective property rights granted by law 70 1993, every community constituted a “community council,” an administrative body representing collective territories of black communities for the transfer of resources and revenues (Ng’weno 2001). By law the Community councils are in charge of the protection of

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<sup>103</sup> For instance, the PCN forms a network of more than 120 local organizations.



the environment. People in the workshops I organized mentioned that since 2002 there have been a number of cases in which the collective land titling has been thwarted by traditional party representatives in favor of timber and oil palm companies' interests. Ulrich Öslender in his article "The logic of the River" (2002:86-117) analyzed the case of the Consejo Comunal Unicosta<sup>104</sup> of the municipality of Iscuandé in the Province of Nariño in which state representatives of the INCORA have favored the intervention of a palm extraction company to channel its economic interests in the region. By funding and encouraging the creation of this Community Council this company obtained the permits issued by the Corponariño<sup>105</sup> to have an exclusive contract for the palm heart exploitation and the authorization from the community council.

Environmental issues related to the preservation of the Pacific tropical rainforest ecosystem became paramount for Afro-Colombian organizations that consider the forest as their main cultural patrimony and source of livelihood. According to black movements, human beings need to recover their humanity through their relationship with their environment and collective property has contributed to preserve biodiversity. For the ACABA<sup>106</sup>, created in 1993, their territories are essential to preserve their life and their dignity as people with distinct customs, traditions, and different world-views based on harmonious relation to nature. For this organization, territory includes not only the soil, but the air, the subsoil, and nature in general. Along with ecological claims, they propose alternative notions of development conceived as "their own life-project."

As the war ravaged the Urabá region as well as the Chocó forest since 1997, Afro-Colombian movements adopted a politics of neutrality and embraced the support of

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<sup>104</sup> Community Council Unicosta

<sup>105</sup> Corporación Autónoma de Desarrollo regional, Regional Autonomous Development Corporation

<sup>106</sup> Asociación Campesina del Baudó, Peasant Association of Baudó

international humanitarian agencies. The ACIA<sup>107</sup> has pioneered the creation of ‘peace territories’ and PCN<sup>108</sup> the creation of ‘territories of protection’ under the scrutiny of international agencies. It is important for Afro-Colombian movements to emphasize that their defense of place is based on principles of peace. Repeatedly in my interviews, people stated: “We, black people, have always been people of peace, you do not see us others making trouble or so, obviously that if people piss us off they find us, right?”<sup>109</sup>. In November 2005, forty seven organizations organized around the FISCH<sup>110</sup> have rejected guerrilla and paramilitary intrusion into their territories. They denounced that armed actors interfere the functioning of their community councils eroding people’s everyday lives and security. By denouncing the killing, invasion, expropriation of vast extensions of land, and forced recruitment of people, the FISCH have urged armed groups to respect the International humanitarian law.

As in the case of indigenous movements, Afro-Colombian movements have opposed the neo-liberal reforms adopted by the Colombian government since the early 1990s. According to them, the current model of neo-liberal globalization has expropriated land and relocated people to accommodate new multinational extraction companies. These companies have introduced the cultivation of African Palm, extensive cattle range, and the industrial extraction of wood, gold and platinum, and shrimp. Afro-Colombian movements want to make a political manifesto against these “macro-projects” or concessions that the national government has made to global firms.

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<sup>107</sup> Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato, Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato River.

<sup>108</sup> Proceso de Comunidades Negras, Black Community Process

<sup>109</sup> La gente negra siempre hemos sido gente de paz, a uno no lo ven por ahí metido formando escamas ni nada de eso, lógico que si lo buscan a uno lo encuentran no?

<sup>110</sup> Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó, Interethnic forum Solidarity Chocó

Like the indigenous movements, Afro-Colombian movements have relied on transnational links to carry out their political work instead of turning to a discredited Colombian state. Alfredo, a militant member of AFRODES, illustrated the reasoning behind this stance:

If the state refuses our manifesto we will break relationships with the state. We will never kneel down before the state. We will talk horizontally with the state because we have the moral authority to do so. We have never relied on the state and that is why, instead, we have worked with and looked for funding from agencies and NGOs.<sup>111</sup> (Afro-Colombian Male leader, 35 years old)

Afro-Colombian movements have mobilized international solidarity for their plight against the violation of human rights and the massacres committed against their people in the Chocó province. They work with 23 American congressmen and other Afro-American movements in Latin America such as Gran Comarca Fundadores<sup>112</sup> (that gathers black communities from Panamá, Colombia, and Ecuador); and they are connected to the Alianza Regional Andina de Afro-descendientes<sup>113</sup> and Brazilian Afro-descendent movements.

The silence around centuries of rural land struggle seems to come to an end in the post 1991 Constitution era. Although ethnicity arises gradually as a very recent political discourse since the 1970s and 1980s, the 1991 Constitution officially creates the institutional arena to deploy a long-time ignored cultural heritage and demand political inclusion. Colombian ethnic movements undertook a politics of difference (Young 1990) forging their own cultural projects based on a new concept of justice: the right to meet their own needs and express their own desires according to their cultural traditions. In the same period (early 1990s) the convergence of neo-liberal reforms, the expansion of drug-trafficking and the

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<sup>111</sup> Si el Estado Rechaza nuestro manifiesto nosotros romperíamos relaciones con el estado. Nosotros nunca nos arrodillaremos frente al Estado. Nosotros hablaremos de tu a tu con el Estado porque tenemos la autoridad moral para hacerlo. Nosotros nunca hemos confiado en el estado y por eso, en cambio, nosotros hemos trabajado con y hemos preferido acudir a agencias y ONGs antes que al Estado.

<sup>112</sup> Great District Founders

<sup>113</sup> Afro-Descendants Regional Andean Alliance

strengthening of guerrilla and paramilitary groups resulted in a war over the lands fought over decades by ethnic minorities and rural social movements.

### **Indigenous Resistance against De-territorialization**

In this section I will discuss the information collected during the workshops I organized to show how indigenous groups discuss history, territory and nature as a cultural patrimony endangered by forced displacement. I will show how indigenous resistance against forced displacement is precisely framed at the confluence of the possibility of cultural assertion of difference and the cultural dislocation imposed by war. I will illustrate my argument with the cases of the Kankuamo and the Pijao displaced communities in Bogotá. On the one hand, Kankuamo displaced groups claim that forced displacement has violated their sacred territory and that is necessary to reestablish the natural unbalance created by war in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. On the other hand, Pijao displaced groups argue that war has impeded them to pursue their struggle for lands that constitute the key trait of their history and fierce culture.

Indigenous people discussed forced displacement as the continuous and progressive process of cultural loss (*pérdida cultural*) that they have been subjected to since the times of the Spanish Conquest. Forced displacement for indigenous groups who participated in my workshops cannot be discussed outside of a history of violence that deserves to be retold and includes the massacre of hundreds of indigenous political leaders. They considered that their appeal to history is the only way to rescue an alternative version of Colombian history that was made by leaders that were killed in their struggle for land. They made reference to a collective memory based on their traditions of political organization and the recovery of

these leaders' main ideas. One leader from the Pijao group explains the homage offered by their organization to their death leaders as part of their politics of non-forgetfulness:

First, for all of us, the death of a *compañero* was awful, we writhed like worms. Unfortunately death has become a sport. However, we try to recover [the death]'s ideas because the one who has died, as the saying says, came from earth and will come back to earth. Nobody has come with anything and nobody goes with anything. But, to recover our *compañero's* ideas of fight and his blood, so to speak, we remember him with the non-rendition of our struggle. That blood over there every day is telling us '-listen, go forward!'. (Indigenous man, leader from Pijao group, 48 years old)<sup>114</sup>

Indigenous people call displacement “de-territorialization” to point out the fact that the current displacement is not new, that it has lasted over 500 years, and is intrinsically tied to a recurrent historical technology of power used by the government and its local landowners to expropriate them from their territories' wealth. They pointed out that forced displacement is a cruel version of the old expropriation, robbery (*saqueo*) and eviction they had been submitted to in the last 510 years. The arrival of the Spaniards was mentioned as a *desgracia* (tragedy) meaning the beginning of their forgetting of their culture and their distancing from their tradition. If the processes of conquest and colonization provoked devastation and cultural loss, they affirmed that the current forced displacement is part of a new form of colonization. They brought into the discussion past displacements during which many groups escaped up to the mountains, and were adopted by other indigenous groups who gave them their names, making reference to the numerous Guambiano sharecroppers who settled in the Nasa communities of northern Cauca during the period of *La Violencia*.

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<sup>114</sup> Primero para nosotros eso era espantoso, la muerte de un compañero eso nosotros nos revolcábamos como gusanos. Desgraciadamente ya se volvió deporte la muerte. Sin embargo, nosotros como que tratamos de recuperar las ideas, porque el que murió como dice el dicho 'salió de tierra y a tierra volverá' 'Nadie llegó con nada y nadie se va con nada. Pero, sin embargo, como para recobrar nosotros las ideas o la sangre, podríamos decir, de un compañero de lucha nosotros lo recordamos con el no desfallecimiento de la lucha. Esa sangre allá todos los días nos está diciendo '-vea, echen p'adelante!'.

However, during the current forced displacement they had to seek refuge in the cities because almost every indigenous community had been affected by war.

According to their retelling of Colombian history, forced displacement has been closely linked to the episodes and chapters of a long history of colonization, evangelization, and imposition of a pervasive western mentality. According to most of the indigenous leaders, two ideological apparatuses have been the most effective agents of cultural domination: the Colombian government and the Catholic Church.

In their narrations, most of the national governments appeared not only corrupt but also incompetent to address the issue of land-tenure and agrarian reform. Leandro is a Nasa leader who is currently in Bogotá working on behalf of his community's indemnity claims after the Naya Massacre in April 2001 when forty people were killed, sixty disappeared, hundreds displaced by paramilitaries. He asserted that civil society, this is all of us, are responsible for electing the kind of politicians we have as our representatives:

We have elected them with our votes. We are the ones who vote. We have the leaders that we have elected, those who take us there as pigs to the pirogue, in exchange of a *tamal*, one zinc tile, or a bulk of cement. So, if we already know how the system to elect the president works, and we are the ones who put our shoulders to take him [alluding to the recently elected president Alvaro Uribe] up with our vote, we are indulging, we are the main criminals, we are the ones who voted for our representatives. (Indigenous man from the Nasa group, 35 years old) <sup>115</sup>

Indigenous leaders affirmed that the Catholic Church was the pillar that sustained the dominant national culture. Through evangelization, Church silenced and condemned any kind of indigenous resistance or insurrection. The Catholic Church controlled over the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public national educational system in their *resguardos* through

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<sup>115</sup> Los hemos elegido con nuestros votos. Es que nosotros somos los que votamos. Tenemos los mismos líderes que elegimos que son los que nos llevan allá como marranos a la canoa, por un tamal, por una teja de zinc, por un bulto de cemento. Entonces, si sabemos el sistema de elegir al presidente y nosotros le ponemos el hombro para subirlo con el voto, permitimos somos nosotros los principales criminales somos los que votamos por nuestros representantes.

whip and physical punishment. One of the participants in one of my workshops considered important to make a historical reference to the period called *La Violencia* to illustrate how Catholic priests were also active agents of Colombian violence. In his speech this indigenous leader affirmed Catholic priests were active instigators of violence when using religious images and colors to create hatred between liberal and conservative partisans:

If we do our accounts well, since 1821, how many years [have we been in this situation]. Since the birth of the liberal party with the participation of the higher Church hierarchies, both liberal and conservatives. They have instilled in our heads the conviction by using colors: and you realize that the Virgin Carmen has a blue robe and the Sacred Heart of Jesus has one in red. Because the ones who were liberals as well as those who were *cachiporros*, so they called them, stole, committed massacres, but they were forgiven by our Lord Jesus Christ represented in the Holy Heart. For the *godos* [conservatives] who killed and stole, their lawyer was the Virgin and they put her on a blue robe. Do you see how far these people went and how they corrupted our religion that with and without willing they introduced the Holy Sacred Jesus and the Virgin Carmen into politics of color? (Indigenous man from the Pijao group, 48 years old).<sup>116</sup>

By alluding to the period called *La Violencia* to exemplify how official religious institutions have been involved in the politics of violence in Colombia, Heliodoro (Pijao leader) is not only showing the repetitious patterns of Colombian violence but also the way in which Catholicism contributed to the erasure of their cultural heritage. Evangelist and Protestant groups are also mentioned as the new emissaries of western ideology, keeping their followers sedated before the violations of human rights committed against indigenous communities in an everyday basis.

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<sup>116</sup> Y si hacemos cuentas desde 1821 cuantos años hace que nació el partido liberal con la participación de las altas jerarquías eclesiásticas tanto liberales como conservadoras. Para meternos en la cabeza el convencimiento le echaron mano a los colores: y ustedes se dan cuenta que la Virgen del Carmen tiene una túnica azul y el Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, la tiene roja. Por que los que eran liberales o cachiporros que llamaban, robaban, masacraban, pero eran perdonados por nuestro señor Jesucristo representado en el Sagrado Corazón. Para los godos que mataban y robaban entonces la abogada de ellos era la Virgen y le pusieron su manto azul. Fíjense ustedes hasta donde esa gente corrompió nuestra religión que sin querer queriendo metieron en política partidista de color al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y a la Virgen del Carmen.

Their historical struggle over lands, leads them to assert their territory as a whole universe of rights that have been fought and ratified since the 1991 Constitution. The place of before for them has represented the wisdom of their grandparents who knew the importance of spiritual ties with nature.

Using a lexicon borrowed from anthropological studies, indigenous leaders said during our encounters that their laws obeyed a distinct “worldview” (*cosmovisión*) which entailed a permanent harmonic relationship with their territory. Territory was necessary to think and share wisdom. Thinking and nature were joined. Victor Jacanamijoy explains: “Our territory is wide to think. Territory teaches you to think; it is a multiplier of life, it produces food when you cultivate it.”<sup>117</sup> Their territory and their homes were the spaces to sit, hear the old people and share wisdom. Activities such as weaving in the case of the indigenous from the Sierra Nevada and the practice of looking at the landscape in the case of the Nasa indigenous groups were mentioned as means by which they kept communication with these paths and walks of history. They affirmed that territory is seen and felt and that their elders have taught them to experience the sacred in daily life.

During the workshops history was discussed as the path that previous generations have walked by for them to see ahead. History is past experience, source of knowledge that they recovered gradually to acquire more vision of who they are and who they will be. The links between the past and the present as ways of dealing with the future are not independent of spatial notions of territory which is the space they name, bless and walk. They search and go by their territory identifying sacred sites where their ancestors reside and where they learnt about their word (Vasco 2001).

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<sup>117</sup> Nuestro territorio es amplio de pensar. El territorio te enseña a pensar; es un multiplicador de la vida, produce comida cuando lo cultivas”



Our ancestors, the elders, are in front, guiding our actions in the present, the foundation of the future of our people. Our actions correspond to the teachings of the elders and determine the future of our existence. Our people walk, observing the footprints of the elders in front of us. (Jesús Enrique Piñacué, member of the Colombian Senate in: Jackson 2002:58)

For indigenous groups, their territories and the time of before are discussed as their moral templates aimed to guide their future lives. It is the time of the grandparents when things were according to the tradition. In those “times of before” they say that they had a quiet and particularly healthy life as opposed to the moral degeneration they see in the cities. Those were also the times when they ate well and food had no chemicals. Before the war arrived to their territories, people died of aging or for illnesses, not because of war. But today they die of *plomonía* using a neologism in which they play with the word plomo (bullets) and the word *pulmonía* (pneumonia) to refer to the new disease of killing, this is, *plomonía*.

In their talk of displacement Kankuamo internally displaced people define their territory as cosmic and spiritual. The land, so they say, is Mother Earth, from which all living beings were born. As part of a wider universe, the places to which they belong to are harmonized by rituals that ensure equilibrium among its inhabitants and ruled by the laws of the creator of the ancestors.

Reverdecer Almendro, traditional healer from the Uitoto Amazon group worked with the ONIC since 1993 and participated in the construction of a *maloka* for the Bogotá Botanic Garden. He was very happy when I invited him to come to my class at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia to give us a lecture on displacement and alternative indigenous thinking because spreading the indigenous word was one of his main missions in the city. According to the indigenous Amazonian holistic way of thinking, territory has the form of a spiral connecting the cosmos, the earth, and the underground. In the underground there are

nine worlds. In his presentation he demonstrated how the treasures kept under indigenous territories were “the bombs and the illnesses of the world.” When there was robbery of emeralds, gold and oil all these energies were released and got out of human control. Indigenous people knew that they should always ask permission through rituals to get the resources from these nine worlds. Amazonian indigenous of the Americas had a prophecy to reveal throughout the world that could be explained through three terms: word, tobacco and coca. Reverdecer was making reference to the ritual through which Uitoto groups reminded their ancestral knowledge. Coca and tobacco, sacred plants that once ritually processed allowed their spiritual leaders to connect them with their mother’s heart and with their father’s word. In other words, the wisdom to teach westerners how to live well was inscribed in the ritual use of coca and tobacco.

He also affirmed that the government was using displacement as a justification to say that indigenous groups were losing the knowledge they used to have to manage their territories. Their idea was to keep an indigenous surveillance over these resources that made the Western mind got mad because “an indigenous outside of its territory was an indigenous who worth nothing.”

In their narratives, some groups from the Cauca region alluded to the Greater Law (*Derecho Mayor*) according to which they were in charge of the conservation and preservation of harmonic life in planet earth. They affirmed that their respect for nature was related to its spiritual character (Rappaport 2005:268). Despite the acknowledgement regarding the crucial role that indigenous communities have played in the preservation of the environment, in December 2005 a New Forestal law has been passed favoring the extraction and commercialization of natural resources under the guise of “promoting the development

of the Colombian forestal sector.” This law eliminates the National System of Natural Parks and opens up the commercial extraction of timber under the name of “commercial reforestation”. Organized indigenous groups openly opposed this law through the web page of the ONIC:

We are the holders of a Major Right, based on the fact that we have been living here since the beginning of all times and it is our duty to ensure our future generations’ existence. As we have always believed in Law, since 1991 until today, we have been waiting peacefully for the Colombian state, with all the benefits of the rights consecrated in the National Constitution, fulfill with its social and judicial responsibility, enforce our rights and carry out the agreements that it has signed to alleviate the calamity that it has produced with its economic policies and military excesses. We demand the respect and protection of our territories and their natural resources which are foundational and essential for our collective life and cultural identity. We demand to suspend and file the Forestal Law. <sup>118</sup> (ONIC 2006).

In a very eloquent tone, indigenous groups claimed to reside in ancestral places since the beginning of all times and be the possessors of the resources that according to their discourse were essential for the survival of their culture. Instead of commodities, as the way state institutions and transnational companies see their territories, they defined them as sacred entities that integrate humans and non-humans.

Additionally, as a special jurisdiction, indigenous territory entails political and juridical autonomy. When participants of the workshops mentioned autonomy they were making reference to the International treaties signed by the Colombian government and granting them self-determination and autonomy as well as the 1991 Constitution norms regarding their autonomy in the administration and management of their territories. The

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<sup>118</sup> Somos titulares de un Derecho Mayor, sustentado en que estamos aquí desde el principio de todos los tiempos y es nuestro deber garantizar la pervivencia de nuestras futuras generaciones. Y como siempre hemos creído en la ley desde el 91 hasta nuestros días estamos esperando pacíficamente a que el estado colombiano, con todo y las bondades de los derechos consagrados en la Constitución Nacional cumpla con su responsabilidad social y jurídica de realizar nuestros derechos y cumplir con los acuerdos que en el entretanto suscribió para mitigar las desgracias que nos ha ocasionado con sus políticas económicas y desmanes militares. Demandamos que se nos respeten y protejan nuestros territorios y recursos naturales fundamento y esencia de nuestra vida colectiva e identidad cultural. Que se suspenda y archive la ley forestal.

“Special Indigenous Jurisdiction” that often conflicts and overlaps with the national legal system represents an incredibly powerful juridical tool for indigenous people movements: their right to be processed within their territories by their own judicial authorities under the coordination and observance of the National judicial system that will determine the legality (due process) and pertinence of the indigenous juridical procedures and sanctions.

Land for them has meant access and control over territory, as the history of their movements demonstrates. Territory means traditional forms of governing; to have their own government, law, and tradition, according to the 1991 Constitution mandate. They believed that behind the current war there is a global interest after the resources that they have owned and protected over the centuries:

But, finally, what does that word *de-territorialization* mean? What it means is that not only are they kicking us out individually but also, that they are after what’s in there, where we lived. If we look carefully, all of them go after the natural resources, the dam, the mining, the oil.<sup>119</sup> (indigenous man, from the Uuitoto group, 51 years old)

Indigenous affirmed that as agriculturalists (although many have been drivers and public functionaries) only through land can they ensure food. In the city they had been forced to hunger and food assistance, a humiliating situation for indigenous people used to “cultivate land in a traditional form”, “to get what they eat”. They stressed the fact that they were not asking more than a plot of land to get what was necessary to eat because they were not like greedy capitalists who accumulated goods and properties.

For political indigenous leaders that participated in my workshops war and violation of human rights that they witnessed in their territories had been part of a historical *mestizo* and western project aimed at weakening “their tradition.” As in the past, extraction of

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<sup>119</sup>“Pero en últimas esa palabra desterritorialización qué es lo que dice. Lo que dice es que a nosotros no solamente nos están corriendo a cada uno sino es que van por lo que hay donde estábamos nosotros. Si nos ponemos a ver todos van por recursos naturales, por la represa, por la minería, por el petróleo.

economic and cultural wealth had been the reasons of forced displacements. They say they did not want to be further divided ideologically nor materially through the inoculation of western values such as consumption and greed. One difference between old displacements and the new ones is that today they are strong politically and well organized to fight back. In order to unmake a “wrongly conceived” western model of development that had already done so much harm they proposed to be the guides of a new concept of development to foresee the country’s future. For them what had been wrongly defined as “civilization” was rather a corrupted mentality that had misled their communities.

Indigenous leaders from the Southern Andean region of Cauca and Putumayo, the Southern plains of Tolima, and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta affirmed that during the late 1980s, guerrilla groups used to recruit many young members of their communities and use them to extract timber and cultivate coca crops. They said that the guerrillas were doing the same thing that Spaniard conquistadores did when they needed soldiers in their armies. The participants in my workshops agreed that during the mid 1990s paramilitaries arrived in their regions and expelled the guerrillas, crossing through their *resguardos* without respecting their territorial boundaries. First, under the rule of the guerrillas, and later, under the rule of paramilitaries, they were subjected to the so-called *vacunas* (imposed taxations) on cattle, livestock, and crops, forcing them to take allegiances with either one or the other armed group. Since then they had not been able to exploit “traditionally,” so they said, the resources for their sustenance.

Today, paramilitary groups monopolize the extraction of timber and have started a terror campaign they called *guerra psicológica* (psychological war) to evict people living in areas rich in oil and biodiversity, areas that have been included within state and global

macro-plans, according to indigenous organizations. The aerial spraying of coca crops that was part of the Plan Colombia supported by the US had contaminated people's crops and forced them to leave their places of work and residence, causing physical and health problems in the Southern Amazonian regions. On the other hand, there was a permanent circulation of rumors accusing agricultural workers and indigenous communities of being informers of either or the other armed groups but they complained that mostly they were labeled as being collaborators of guerrilla groups. One Pijao leader decided to explain that impunity was what prevailed in his homeland, and used a cynical tone to describe the endless list of armed groups that emulated the control of the public order, spreading impunity and lawlessness:

The so-called public order is not an order but a disorder in practice: there are guerilla, paramilitaries, army, police, DAS, SIJIN, F-2, PM, hired-killers. Each of them armed supposedly in charge of maintaining "the order." But where there is order there should be justice; and concerning the dead persons, nobody is guilty, nobody is processed for it." "In my region there is a disorder and about the dead nobody is guilty. <sup>120</sup> (man from the Pijao group, 48 years old)

For indigenous people, displacement includes those members of their communities who remained in their homelands suffered most of the war damages and anguish. They needed to demonstrate that those in their homeland and those who are in Bogotá formed a strong link. They clearly stated that they could forget them because people who stayed behind were getting old from lack of sleep and concern about their future. This alliance between those who stayed behind and those who lived in Bogotá, or in any other city, also meant that strong bonds with a common homeland had last despite mobility and that the possibility of returning might be pursued anytime in the future. This was also a response to

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<sup>120</sup> "El llamado orden público no es un orden, es un desorden en la práctica. Hay guerrilla, hay paramilitares, hay ejército, hay policía, hay DAS, hay SIJIN, F2, PM asesinos a sueldo; todos armados dizque guardando el orden. Porque si hay orden hay justicia, hay equidad. Pero eso es un desorden y de los muertos nadie es culpable de eso".

the government that argued that indigenous lost their culture and knowledge once they were out of their territories.

### **Looking Back to the Law of Origin: the Kankuamo Case**

I met Imer during the first workshop I organized at the ONIC. Later on, I saw him while we were both attending the several seminars and meetings on forced displacement held around the city. Imer wore his traditional dress and *poporo*, a small wooden container where he put coca leaves and *hayo* that he chew as an important spiritual practice that the communities from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta practice to meditate and think. He told me that his wife saw with good eyes their household's displacement. Imer had stopped drinking and he had found his vocation as an artist and as a writer in Bogotá. His positive experience in the city did not mean that he had forgotten his spiritual leader's mandates. On the contrary, he deeply believed that "only by obeying the mandates of the *Mama* of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta could we change our hearts that have turned black these days."

Kankuamo indigenous people had been particularly affected by forced displacement during the last five years. They had faced the selective killings of important leaders and in the towns of the Province of Cesar they were accused of being collaborators of the guerrilla groups. They had made their voices heard at the global level from the city of Bogotá through their links with international and national IGOs and NGOs such as UNCHR, HEMERA<sup>121</sup>, and CODHES.

I got to know the entire group of internally displaced Kankuamo people through an anthropologist friend of mine who was helping them out to set up a cooperative and a store in the historic district of La Candelaria in Bogotá. As documented by Morales and Pumarejo

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<sup>121</sup> Etnias de Colombia, Ethnic groups of Colombia

(2003), the Kankuamo indigenous group was in a process that they call re-ethnization when many of their leaders were murdered and hundreds of them had to flee to Bogotá. That is why they strongly claimed that their wisdom and spirituality emanated from their practices of inhabiting their abandoned territory. They saw forced displacement as a violation to the Law of Origin, the fundamental myth of creation for the indigenous groups of the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, deeply affecting their cultural and spiritual identity.

As a response, kankuamo leaders strengthened their identity through the training of leaders “with a clear vision of who they were”. The conflict was interpreted as an opportunity for indigenous groups from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to spread their word about the importance to acknowledge energetic forces and ancestral wisdom, because as they said, a major change of thinking was needed to stop the war.

The Kankuamo group inhabits the South Eastern part of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a system of mountains where three other ethnic groups have their *resguardos*: the Kogi, Arhuaco, and wiwa groups. Up until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kankuamo group was considered a *mestizo* rural community who lost part of its indigenous culture and was integrated to the dynamics of the Colombian peasantry. In 1871, the Capucino missionaries arrived and started an intense evangelization through their school in Atanquez. According to the conversations held with Kankuamo leaders during the workshops I organized with them, for millenia, there were no troubles in the Sierra, for all was harmony and balance but the Catholic influence as well as their contact with *mestizo* migrants from the lowlands of the Caribbean introduced ideas that were alien to the thought of the *Mamas*, traditional political and spiritual authorities who possessed ancestral wisdom of the Original Law (*ley se*) and were able to prevent what was about to happen and what should not happen.



Kankuamo indigenous people were called *indios* (indians) when they went to the provincial capital Valledupar and *civilizados* (civilized) by other native groups who considered the Kankuamo did not strictly stick to the tradition like them. Kankuamo families used circuits of labor migration to Valledupar and other cities of the Caribbean where they used to send their children to the schools and universities. In those towns prestige and status were obtained through western education, and the use of western clothing and accessories. However, since 1994 they initiated a movement of re-ethnization in which they say they heard the call of the tradition “to open the path and return to the circle” as Diomedes, a Kankuamo leader said. This movement arose before the potential extension of the Kogi, Wiwa and Ika resguardos over the Kankuamo territory. Using the discourse of the Kogi group, the most traditional of the four groups inhabiting the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, they said that their ancestors had especially given them a territory with precise boundaries, written in geographic accidents such as rivers, big stones, trees, and lakes.

Kankuamo leaders insisted that their territory was located within “the black line” which corresponds to a territorial delimitation connecting 39 important sacred places recognized by the Colombian government in 1993 as the ancestral territory of indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The black line not only marked traditional territorial integrity but also proved that their identity was intrinsically tied to that territory (Ulloa 2005). Appealing to their mythology of creation, they affirmed how this wide territory was conceived as a stove supported by four stones in which each stone represented each one of the indigenous groups of the Sierra. The Kankuamo group represented the fourth stone, the stone which had distanced itself from the tradition and needed to go back to the Original Law

se (*ley se*), a principle of life and sacred knowledge to rebalance and preserve the entire Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

To communicate with their ancestors, they needed to recover the ritual practice of the *pagamento*, material offerings which symbolized spiritual food given to the spirits of the species so that nature may function and rebalance. The rituals of *pagamento* consisted on offerings through which people gave back to Mother Earth all of which has been taken out from it in specific sites where indigenous prayed for the balance between human beings and nature to be reestablished. With the energy of their powerful thought they asked Mother Earth not to destroy people with pests and calamities that may fall upon plants and animals. When I asked them how they recovered the ritual of *pagamento* they told me that they stopped their visits to the Catholic churches that still stand in their towns and built their *terauricas*, their traditional ceremonial houses. There they carried out their official assemblies and community meetings.

Right now we have been restarting this new process. We have said, ok ready, concerning the churches we have, we are not going to turn them down or anything like that, but if we want to strengthen what's a key part of our traditional houses, that among us have been called *teruaricas* (...) this is the traditional house that would be the equivalent of our churches, our real churches, this would be, this is what we have been recovering as the process of [recovery of ]identity evolves. In this moment we have [teruaricas] in the upper towns, Guatapurí and Chemesquemena.<sup>122</sup> (indigenous man, Kankuamo group, 42 years old)

Diomedes explained to me that the Catholic churches that were still present in their home-towns were vestiges of the process of negotiation or “pact” between the Kankuamo community and the Spanish Catholic culture. As Patrick Morales and Adriana Pumarejo

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<sup>122</sup> Ahora es que estamos retomando este nuevo proceso. Nosotros hemos dicho, bueno listo, si se fijan las iglesias no las vamos a tumbar ni nada por el estilo, pero nosotros sí queremos fortalecer lo que es la parte de las casas tradicionales que entre nosotros se llaman *teruaricas* (...) que es la casa tradicional esa debía ser la iglesia de nosotros real, esa sería, eso se está recuperando a como vaya evolucionando el proceso de identidad. En estos momentos están en los pueblos de arriba Guatapurí y Chemesquena.

(2003) have described, a recurrent story in Kankuamo oral history narrated the recurrent destruction of Catholic churches that could never be finished. The Catholic influence in the ritual of *pagamento* could be seen in the celebration of the Corpus Christi. The Kankuamo group developed a syncretic religion in which indigenous performances and old Catholic symbols and practices coexisted. The Corpus Christi celebration consists of a Catholic mass followed by a procession in which the holy sacrament is carefully carried out within a golden custody walked throughout the town. Several characters dressed in their customs perform dances and combats, some playing to defend the custody whereas others try to grab it. During the procession these characters call the ancestors stopping and praying at ancient sacred stones.

Kankuamo participants in the workshops also mentioned that they had recovered part of their old language and put their traditional dresses on although they had not been able to find out their exact original shape and color. At the time of the interviews conducted with them they were advised not to wear that white dress called *makeka* in Bogotá for security reasons. They said that men and women haven't lost the everyday practice of weaving their *mochilas*, personal hand-made bags they have been taught to knit since they were children.

When I asked them to describe how Chemesquema and Atánquez looked like, they drew the wells and the stones which represented key spatial and temporal markers that demonstrated their “true indianness” as these were the sites used to do their *pagamentos*

Here, is the stone to sit for those who are job-less (laughing) under that *guanabana* tree; and there is the avocado tree between our house and Milciades' house. Here goes, in the center, the Guatapuri river; there after that perimeter there is the road that connects with other communities; close from each other, this was Flaminio's house, and to this side of the road there was my grandfather's house, there my uncle's house and down the river there is a traditional well where we all gather to take a bath. We use to go all together to that well because is a special site, it is a tourist spot; it is called the Sixto's well to honor the name of one of the patriarchs of our community who owned it; this is our well that has

five creeks and there is a bridge to go from the well to go by. (Male indigenous Kankuamo, 28 years old)<sup>123</sup>

During the same workshop while people talked about the two houses they had (their houses in town and the houses in the countryside) Kankuamo men and women provided a vivid description of the big party they used to organize when a young couple got married: in the party, the father in law gave a piece of land to the groom as a gift. Thirty to forty people used to attend to cut wood and straw to build the couple's home. They also killed a pig provided by the in-laws and organized a *parranda* (big party), with a group of musicians playing *Vallenato* which was a mix of indigenous and Caribbean rhythms playing *acordeón*, a European musical instrument that Kankuamo people as well as *costeños* (mestizo people from the Caribbean Coast) used to listen day and night.

This case shows how external forces (the Catholic evangelization and war) have shaped and transformed many times Kankuamo identity claims. Their recent process of re-ethnization reinvigorated by the 1991 Constitution rejected the old adoption of *mestizo* religious, regional mobility and mundane practices to appear less indigenous before the local *mestizo* population. War has hampered and left unfinished this important aspiration to recover and follow an ancestral tradition. Kankuamo indigenous leaders see the benefits and the unexpected advantages to live in Bogotá although they will never admit they are losing their customs. Their memories about their most salient cultural traits are particularly highlighted in their narratives as principles of difference they should never forget but also as

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<sup>123</sup> Aquí, esta la piedra de los varados debajo de una palo de guanabana; (risas) y aquí es el palo de aguacate entre la casas de nosotros y la de Milciades. Aquí, sobre todo este centro va un río, el Guatapuri; aquí, seguido de este perímetro, llega la vía de acceso que viene de las otras comunidades; todo cerca, esta era la casa de Flaminio, de este lado de la carretera era la casa de mi abuelo, allí la casa de mi tío y aquí hacia abajo del río está un pozo tradicional donde todos nos reuníamos para bañarnos todos, para llegar a ese pozo es un sitio especial, el sitio turístico por excelencia, el sitio donde todo el mundo que llega al pueblo dice, ese pozo se llama el pozo de Sixto, eso es en honor de uno de los patriarcas de la comunidad y era de él. Ese es el pozo nuestro, llega hasta por aquí, llega de nuevo al río, hay un puente para ir al pozo, para ir a paseos.

a political stance to oppose a war designed strategically to weaken their indigenous spiritual force anchored in their tradition and their harmonic relation to nature.

## **Visions of the Stolen Gold: Mobility and Recovery of Lands among the Pijao**

### **Indigenous Group**

I got to know this indigenous group of internally displaced men and women through a Pijao student of mine. We had our first meeting in a big colonial house located at one corner of the historical District of Bogotá. This house was rented by the director of the organization of Wayuu indigenous group (an indigenous group located in the Guajira peninsula in front the of the Caribbean Sea) acting in solidarity with the claims of his Pijao fellows.

To follow this indigenous group in Bogotá I had to become a circumstantial activist (Marcus 1998) and represented them as an anthropologist expert that would certify their indigenousness before the Oficina de Asuntos indígenas del Ministerio del Interior<sup>124</sup>. I acted as a *colaborador* during three months during which I was in charge of collecting the information they needed in order to obtain the indigenous jurisdiction through the creation of their *Resguardo* Ambiká in Bogotá. They turned in to me various hand-written reports that they classified under various rubrics such as “historical antecedents” “experiences”, “preservation of customs,” “legends and stories,” “beliefs,” “traditional meals.” Through a recollection of basic traits and using the style of school books of geography and history they demonstrated that they still remembered old practices and stories that their grandfathers and grandmothers knew well. In order to present themselves in the terms the Oficina de Asuntos indígenas del Ministerio del Interior required, they wrote a document in which one could read a metaphorical code of their history of dispossession and recovery of lands. In one of the

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<sup>124</sup> Indigenous Affairs Office of the Ministry of Domestic Affairs

chapters called “legends and stories” they narrate how the mountains that surround the towns of Coyaima and Natagaima opened their doors every Friday of the Holy Week. The few persons who dared to enter through that door and survived could see plenty of gold and treasures among which there was a duck with her little duckies and the giant golden bell of the church of Natagaima that was stolen by the Spaniards during the Conquest.

Many of the Pijao narratives had this reference to the mountains that harbored precious treasures. This was a recurrent metaphor to interpret their fleeing from the Spanish persecution and their seeking for refuge in the mountains. There they dug their wealth and treasures in tunnels and paths that they saw every Holy Week.

Surprisingly, in the material I gathered they did not present any information regarding their life in Bogotá. In the document they wrote they mentioned that they were agriculturalists rooted to their land, despite the fact that some had resided for more than five years in the city. They intended to conceal the information that proved that they were too “urban” and it was only by asking them several times about their activities in the city that I got to know that most of the Pijao men worked as building workers and assistants and that they had even colonized this labor sector in Bogotá. Women worked as janitors and they made and sold tamales or ethnical food using the commercial networks of this informal circuit that tied Bogotá with the home-towns in the province of Tolima.

The Pijao leaders alluded to a long history of recovery of lands. They formed a group that was hardly considered “indigenous” by mainstream society and by the state. Most of them had an intense history of voluntary and involuntary mobility and a strong bond with the peripheries of the districts of Santa Rosa de la Loma in the peripheries of Bogotá.

In the reports that the members of the *Cabildo Ambiká* wrote to the office of the Ministerio del Interior to support their claims of being an indigenous group in need of shelter in Bogotá, they said that they wanted their history to be retold and the times of the colonization remembered. Informed by anthropological studies as well as their own research conducted in their home-towns, they mentioned their warrior character to oppose the Spanish Conquest and their desire to fight back and keep their historical past present. They said they have opposed ferociously the Spanish Conquest as well as the pacification campaigns led by the Catholic Church. They presented themselves, above all, as experts in the arts of resistance. They wanted to stress the way the Catholic Church obtained the co-administration of these territories in 1887 and secured the Pijao labor force to use it for the services required by the big haciendas of the region. The leaders of this group used this historical reference to explain the reasons for them to lose their language and adopt the peasant economy of the Tolima plains.

According to anthropological studies (Triana 1993, Pachón 1996) in the Southern plains of the Tolima province, Pijao indigenous groups have lived in the municipalities of Ortega, Chaparral, Coyaima and Natagaima. They have always been considered part of the Colombian peasantry and migrated back and forth to Bogotá. Various governors have declared that there were no indigenous groups in the Province of Tolima because “they shared the average cultural traits” of any other peasant group in Colombia (Triana 1993). The warrior character mentioned in their reports referred to a long history of resistance in the face of the several displacements and evictions that they have experienced in their struggle for lands.

Supported by the communist party and the peasant movements of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Indigenous movement of the Tolima opposed the landowners' campaign to expand their properties. During the workshops they mentioned that with their main leader, Manuel Quintín Lame, a non-Pijao indigenous man displaced from the Cauca Province, they organized and obtained the recognition of the big *Resguardo* de Ortega y Chaparral in 1939. The dispossession and eviction of the groups living in that area intensified during the 1940's and 1950's and most of them embraced the state programs of credits and individual purchase of lands promoted by the INCORA. According to the most experienced leaders this was a strategy employed by the state to buy later on individual plots of lands that belonged to their *resguardo*. In 1964 a Pijao community was evicted from a fertile area called Yaguará and many abandoned their lands and accepted to sign a pact with the state program that offered them lands in the Amazon plains of the Yarí in the Caquetá province that they baptized Yaguará II. Since then, they opened a circuit of migration to Caquetá and Meta provinces where many usually went to work as sharecroppers of the cattle ranges and rice farms of Granada, Acacías and San Martín.

Inspired by the Agrarian Reform of 1967, the Indigenous regional Council of Tolima undertook the invasion of lands over which they had juridical rights. They located the original titles of plots identified as "lands in dispute" by the INCORA and they started a process of "political pressure" occupying, sowing the land, and building little individual and collective homesteads. When I asked a Pijao leader how he remembered their homelands he said that they always walk, wander and work their soil. Yet, I knew they had been traveling from Tolima and Bogotá for a significant part of their lives. Nevertheless, he mentioned spots that are crucial for the Pijao collective life, beliefs and oral history: *el monte*, (the mountain),



the sources of water, and the *charcos* (small marshes) where supernatural beings dwell, surveil hidden golden treasures, and often make their appearances. Pijao leaders that attended the workshops also mentioned the importance of having two houses: one where they lived and the other built using cement that they used to show to the visitors as symbols of material prosperity; their orchard and the community plots. They affirmed that what they missed the most was to cultivate the land because land was mother earth, source of life.

This case demonstrates how, prior to the 1991 Constitution, an indigenous community that used to hide its “indianness” and was classified by the state and by *mestizo* local landowners as a *campesino* community, undertakes a process of cultural recovery and claims a special indigenous jurisdiction in the city of Bogotá, this is, outside of what the state considers their ‘natural’ primordial geographical territory. The Pijao group appeals to a history in which the defense of their rural *resguardos* is retold as a heroic recovery of a homeland full of stolen gold and indigenous wealth. They invoke memories of suffering for territory to stake claims to land rights (Moore 2005). In the meantime, as labor migrants, they have moved throughout three places: their home-town where their parents and grandparents keep the lands recovered through invasions, Yaguará a second home that enables the young members to look for jobs in little towns of the Amazon area, and Bogotá where they have a thick and strong social network of support and an urban economic ethnic enclave.

### **New Slavery, Old family: Afro-Colombian Talk of Displacement**

Violence [in our territories] is not gratuitous. It is an attempt to grab the natural resources that we have protected for generations, in order to build mega-projects in our lands. How is that lives of innocent civilians cannot be protected from the violence of the armed conflict while the big companies who want to steal our natural resources get protection?  
([www.ctconfucc.org/partnertships/colombia/colmbiatrip3.html](http://www.ctconfucc.org/partnertships/colombia/colmbiatrip3.html))

This are the words that Tomás Mosquera uses to start his text posted on the web as part of his role as an Afro-Colombian activist living in exile and denouncing the violation of human rights against the black communities.

AFRODES web page also opens with four words: land, culture, autonomy, and life. As in the case of indigenous groups, Afro-Colombian organizations dealing with forced displacement, such as PCN and CIMARRÓN, argued they were living very difficult times just as the beginning of their history in the Americas, when they arrived as commodities during the slavery trade. As the old fugitives who fled towards the mountains and the forests to build *palenques*, Afro-Colombian displaced people were contemporary fugitives (*cimarrones*) who fight for dignity, against racism and discrimination within Colombian society, and were willing to build “territories of freedom.” As part of the historical consciousness of their members, they said it was very important for them to recall the 334 years of kidnapping and the 150 years of discrimination and its consequences in terms of economic and legal inequality. The abolition of slavery in 1851 made them “free but excluded” as they said to refer to the invisibility they were submitted to over more than 150 years.

For us the territory is not the just the land but everything the subsoil, air, water, nature. With the opening of the market all this discourse around transport and mega-projects began. Later on, after the time has passed, they [the government and the global capital] realized that they have screwed up everything [with the rights given to Afro-Colombian communities]. They are in need of these lands. We ask for the air too because it forms part of nature. We say that it [the air] has also a used value.<sup>125</sup> (Afro-Colombian man, leader of AFRODES)

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<sup>125</sup> Para nosotros el territorio no es la tierra es todo el subsuelo, el aire, el agua, la naturaleza. En la apertura económica surge toda esa carreta del transporte y de los megaproyectos. Después de que hemos avanzado tanto se dan cuenta de que la embarraron. Están necesitando esas tierras, nosotros pedimos el aire porque eso hace parte de la naturaleza. Decimos que eso es un bien de uso

Women who were members of the PCN affirmed that there was an Afro-Colombian territory defined as a biological and a cultural unit and that the preservation of nature depended on the relationship between culture and environment. Territory provided autonomy because it was the habitat where Afro-Colombians “recreated” and “reproduced” their culture. For them the loss of territory due to forced displacement implied a return to slavery.

For most Afro-Colombian organizations, cultural identity was the central principle of their political thinking. They argued that they had a right to differentiate themselves from the dominant cultural, economic and social model. In AFRODES, said its director, “What is important for us is what we call self-recognition, to know clearly who you are and who you want to become. We assume ourselves as blacks and as such we will differentiate from other groups respecting the diversity of Colombian population, of course”. According to members of PCN, there were things of their culture that could be recovered and others that could not but they had to keep feeding and recreating their tradition and culture.

Afro-Colombian movements referred to a defense of *lo propio*, what was one’s own, stated in the following terms: 1) the right to be black, to have a distinctive black identity; 2) The right to the territory as the space for being in harmony with nature; 3) the right to autonomy; 4) the right to construct their own perspective of the future and their own view of social and economic development (Grueso 2005:113).

As a strategic claim, Afro-Colombian activists considered that nature forms part of their social life. They affirmed that “traditionally” they had had a close and harmonic relationship with nature. People alluded to the river basins, where most of Afro-Colombian of the Pacific had lived for centuries, as central references to their sense of belonging, but

more importantly, as part of a discursive formation in which it played the role of a new spatial emblem used for their ecological management and control.

Rural black organizations of internally displaced discusses that they *convivían* (were living intimately linked) with the rivers that gave them autonomy as well as mobility over their territories. Furthermore, rivers allowed them to have traditional systems of production that contrasted with the large-scale anti-ecological extraction of natural resources.

Effectively, scholar research (Arocha 1999, Öslender 1999, 2002) has found how the Atrato and Baudó communities are mainly riverine communities that combine “life strategies” associated to the natural rhythms of tides, and the water levels of affluents and channels.

Some of the participants of the workshops said that they used to have family plots down the river where they worked in teams (*cuadrillas*) with the *compadres* (god parents) with whom they shared the work of the crops of maize, plantain and fruits. In the upper parts of the river some participants combined gold extraction activities with the cultivation of family crops. In the lower part of the rivers, men and women mentioned that they fished and have also agricultural plots to supply their household needs.

Participants in my workshops thought of themselves as good preservers of nature and knew very well that one of the cultural “traits” highlighted by anthropological studies of their communities is their vertical use of their ecosystem. Their unique modes of production and their ecological use of the ecosystem constituted their main argument to defend their territories.

Members of organizations such as PCN insisted that it was this traditional life along the river and its resources regulated by gender based tasks and kinship what legitimized their long-standing right over various non-contiguous spaces. Afro-Colombian interviewees from

the Lower Atrato River affirmed that they had a continuous relation of mobility between the upper and the lower parts of the river they used to inhabit. They mentioned that they remembered the visits made to their extended families located down the river in a nearby affluent. The trips in pirogue enabled them to reach the big towns where they run errands, went shopping, attended meetings, visited family members, and crashed in their godfathers' houses. Migration and traveling had always been highly praised among Afro-Colombians from the Chocó province. Young men were expected to go travel. They usually mentioned that young members of their families should go out to see other things and returned years later, calling this practice *coger camino* (to hit the road) (Arocha 2002).

To demonstrate that the territories from which they were evicted were literally “ancestral,” Afro-Colombians interviewees mentioned that “in one’s home one should die and at their homes women should give birth.” Women narrated a particular practice that consisted on their mothers-in-law burying the placenta and the umbilical cord of their children under the stakes of their houses or under a nearby tree. There are many variations regarding this practice analyzed in length by Jaime Arocha (1999) in the Colombian Pacific. In the north of the province of Chocó the blessing and coating of the umbilical with vegetable and animal substances is related to the acquisition of certain skills and qualities that the new born is believed to have in the future. In the southern part of the Nariño Province women said that they practiced it to prevent witchcraft against the new born. Furthermore, this practice is not exclusive to Afro-Colombians. The Emberá-Wounan indigenous fellows inhabiting the same forest of Chocó also practice it and use it as an emblem of rootedness to their territory.

Men and women during the workshops were emphatic in saying that they missed their wooden houses built on stilts along the river banks to prevent flooding. To have a good

death one had to die in his/her house surrounded by family and friends who gathered and organized nine days of ritual (*la novena*) participants of the workshops affirmed. In this ritual the funeral box symbolizes the pirogue that takes the dead person to the after-world (Arocha 1999). For Afro-Colombians “people are from where their dead are buried” (Arocha 2002:95).

War has prevented entire communities from performing their funeral rites. The bodies of assassinated people were not treated ritually. Afro-Colombian women mentioned in my workshops that when a violent death surprised the individual out of his house its shade did not have the time to look over its steps. They believed the people who hadn't had their *novena* would wander in the darkness of the forest, suffered and haunted people who were alive. Constanza Millán (2005) has found among the survivors of the massacre of Bojayá the same narrative. Her interviewees affirmed that the massacres and abnormal deaths had disquieted the spirits of the forest. Disappeared bodies or death bodies that could not get proper burial could not be at peace and became allies of supernatural creatures inhabiting the forest.

Saying that they have their own “way of being,” people I interviewed elaborated a positive image of themselves arguing that they knew how to have fun and enjoyed life despite all the difficulties in contrast to the sad and silent life-style of the inhabitants of Bogotá. A leader from AFRODES I interviewed considered that music reflected a harmonic relationship with the environment. “Music had taken us out from adversity” he asserted. Participants in my workshops remembered going to dance every Saturday. Instead of clubs the parties were taking place on the streets. Neighbors took the speakers out and anyone could stop and eat, enjoy and drink.

As part of the “uses and customs” hampered by war, people mentioned their lively and vibrant home-town religious celebrations.

We all gathered and we prepared the pirogues, we dressed the Virgin of Carmen up and we brought her into a pirogue and then we went down the river singing. We gave her a ride around the village.<sup>126</sup> (Afro-Colombian Woman, Taller de Vida. 30 years old)

Interviewees mentioned that for the day of the patron of the village they organized food, music, and customs. During the Holy Week they used to cook for the entire village, and groups of musicians called *chirimías* went through the village playing. They dressed up Saints and the Virgin Mary, walking them around the village and traveling them down the river in family pirogues. Christmas time was opened with the making of a big community nativity in which the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus undertook their terrestrial and fluvial rides. During the workshops women community leaders longed for Christmas time when they were selected by their communities to make the community manger of their towns.

Participants of the workshops highlighted that “before” their grandparents knew a series of secrets based on magical knowledge to harness the supernatural beings that lived in the forest. But only very few of them were able to retain something about this “tradition.” This cultural loss of traditional knowledge was attributed to the environmental damage that the recent exploitation of natural resources by big companies had been causing in the Pacific Coast. However, they mentioned that they still remembered some of the tales of spirits and ancestors who inhabited the forest and surrounded their dwellings. Only the healers and very old people knew the “secrets” and prayers to neutralize these supernatural evil forces. Everybody insisted to ask Elena who was a community healer (*comadrona*) to talk about

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<sup>126</sup> Nos reuníamos todos y ahí cogíamos canoa, nos llevábamos la Virgen del Carmen, la arreglábamos y ahí, en tres canoas de esas, nos repartíamos ahí todos, íbamos cantando por el río abajo. La paseábamos de un caserío a otro.

these spirits of the forest that used to scare them so much when they were children and that they would like to hear again. Elena told us that people could get lost if they went very far inside the forest while fishing. Among the supernatural beings one could encounter, she mentioned the *tunda*, faceless woman with yellow hair who sang and called the people by their names. She killed and drowned those who ceded to her invitations by swallowing them with her genitals. Elena also referred to the *hojarasquin de monte*, a masculine being protector of the animals made of interwoven lianas and crowned by wild fruits and flowers who often help those who got lost to find their way back to the river.

Women from political organizations of Tumaco in the Southern part of the Pacific used the environmental discourse to talk about their “distinct culture” and mentioned that trees help preserve the rivers which symbolized life and movement.

Trees are a fundamental part to... we use them as wood for our own house and they are very useful. There are wooden-trees and other that are fruit-trees that are those from which one eats, like the *sapota* tree, the papaya tree, the guava tree, well all these trees that are very important for us, that gave us shadow (...) One says that wherever there are trees there is always water; a creek that does not have trees dries and this has happened, there are many creeks that dried up because the company chop off all its trees, so there are many parts that dried up.<sup>127</sup> (Woman, leader of PCN, from Tumaco, Nariño)

They opposed the deforestation of the area of Tumaco before having been displaced due to paramilitary threats led by timber industries such as Codemaco, Palmas de Tumaco, Palmar Santa Helena, and Palmar del Mira.

Women from the northern part of province of Chocó and the province of Nariño asserted that they hold knowledge, *creencias*, through which they knew how to domesticate

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<sup>127</sup> Los árboles [son] la parte fundamental como para ... nos sirve como para la madera de la casa de uno y bueno [son] de mucha utilidad. Los árboles unos que son maderables, y los otros que son frutales son de los que uno se alimenta, como por lo menos el zapote, la papaya, la guayaba, bueno todos esos son árboles que son muy importantes para uno, también hacen sombra (...) Uno dice que donde hay árboles vive el agua siempre permanente, una quebrada que no tiene árboles se seca y eso pasaba, hay muchos riachuelos que están secos porque como la empresa todos los árboles se los cortaron, entonces hay muchas partes que están secas



plants and animals for traditional medical use and culinary practices. They referred to a long list of traditional healing practices when their children caught cold, fell, or had intestinal worms. In their towns there was always one *comadrona* with powerful mind who knew the prayers and the herbal treatments to purge their children, healed their frequent diseases, or cured family members that got mysteriously ill, had yellow fever or got “bad air”. Women narrated how *mestizo* medical doctors from state hospitals failed to treat adequately some diseases whereas traditional healers that were members of their communities were able to identify when a person had evil eye or was victim of witchcraft. Men mentioned how some traditional healers prepared them little bottles with potions to support sexual dysfunctions. The so-called *sobanderos* were in charge of massaging their children when they suffered fractures or *descuaje* that occurred when children were running and jumping and they got seriously ill afterwards. Women mentioned herbal baths and diets they prepared as part of their recovery after having given birth. Most of them had their children with the assistance of midwives called *comadronas-parteras*. Black movements and Afro-Colombian displaced organizations had recently realized that all these traditional medical knowledge and practices constituted important cultural legacies they need to protect and legitimate as part of the Afro-Colombian patrimony endangered by war.

Using information borrowed from environmental and scholar researches, members of Afro-Colombian organizations stressed their cultural uniqueness and difference. They asserted that forced displacement had been employed to dismember their territories. Forced displacement carried out a destruction of nature, the bedrock of their culture. Participants of my workshops and interviewees clearly asserted that their loss is not just a material loss but it

entailed the destruction of a socio-natural universe encompassing rivers, trees, family ties, social ties, religious beliefs, medical and botanic knowledge.

### **Neo-colonialism in the Lower Atrato River**

This case demonstrates the intersection of multinational timber extraction companies and military campaigns that made the very north of the Province of Chocó one the most current strategic areas in terms of development but also the most violent area in terms of massacres and political violence from 2002 until 2004. Forced displacement in this area had taken the form of an imposed emplacement of communities. Armed actors had established checking points in the rivers and blocked the mobility that people had to maintain their kin ties and commercial activities. Community leaders got threatened and labeled as guerrilla sympathizers.

During the colonial regime, this region called “Tropical Lands of the New Grenada Kingdom” constituted an important gold extraction center using enslaved labor force (West 1953). After independence (1810) and the abolition of slavery (1851) most of the black populations who worked in the big mines of the Chocó Province and the plantations of the Cauca Province, relocated in the lower part of non-inhabited secondary rivers of the Atrato and Baudó rivers. They resettled in dispersed clusters of houses spread out all along the rivers. Due to its ecological and cultural configuration (tropical humid forest inhabited mostly by Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups) this province was only partially colonized and the missionary presence was distant and sporadic. During 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the Colombian state viewed this area as tropical backward forest opposed to the *interior* (Andean cities) seen as the developed and save European-like realm.

The Chocó province remained an unknown and unreliable region in the perception of most part of most nationals. Law 2 from 1959 declared the lands of the Province of Chocó “public lands” which should be colonized with the strength of colonizers, conquerors and *tumbadores de selva* (forest cutters) (Escobar and Pedrosa 1996). Since then, *colonos* from the Andean coffee regions started to cut down the forests of the North of Chocó and led the creation of *mestizo* small villages. Despite its relative isolation, in the early 1990s when Colombia adopted its major neo-liberal reforms the forests of Chocó became a key region for the plan of development of the Pacific called Mar siglo XXI<sup>128</sup>. Since then, forced displacement in the upper Atrato River had been used as a violent technology to include the pacific forest to the recent neo-liberal national plans. From a region perceived until recently as remote and unimportant, the lower Atrato River became the new pole of investment and development at the dawn of the twenty first century.

My interviewees fled a tragic event that reshaped the social life the Low and Middle Atrato Rivers: the bombing of Riosucio, through a military operation called “Génesis,” carried out in December 1996 by the Colombian army and aimed at destroying an alleged guerrilla stronghold. Approximately 500 people were massacred and nearly 20.000 people fled the region. This military action coincided with the collective entitlement of more than 70,000 hectares given to the communities of the Truandó and Cacarica rivers in 1996.

The police coordinated the resettlement of hundreds of households in the stadium of the town of Turbo. Other people resettled in a camp located in Pavarandó whereas 300 more families managed to cross the border with Panamá. In November 1996, the Panamanian authorities repatriated 88 refugees, mainly women and children, to Colombia with the cooperation of the Colombian Air Force.

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<sup>128</sup> Sea XXI century

By the time of my visit to the outskirts of Quibdó, the capital of the province of Chocó, in August 2003, hundreds of households who were displaced in 1996 were living in tiny houses built in concrete in a district called Villa España, evoking the assistance that they obtained from the Spanish humanitarian cooperation. Most of the members of this community were members of OCABA<sup>129</sup> and created the Asociación de Afro-Colombianos Desplazados por el Reasentamiento y el Retorno<sup>130</sup> fighting for what they called a “dignified housing”.

They were known in the region as the people from the Organización Proceso del 96 who organized in committees and occupied the stadium of Quibdó as well as the lands where they built their district. For their street protests, invasion of lands and take-overs my interviewees narrated how they were labeled as sympathizers of the guerrilla groups. They denounced before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights how right after they had taken over the RSS in Quibdó, the police expelled them with gases and how they were threatened from being *guerrilleros*. They sued the state through 419 *tutelas* according to Jesús Albeiro, father of the Diocese of Quibdó. Most of them were related to their children’s right to education and to the teachers’ discrimination against them. Women of this organization have formed the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres<sup>131</sup> to oppose war and claim their rights to a lost territory, future source of life for their children.

The families that I met in Bogotá, escaped this military campaign of 1996 by taking a pirogue from Salaquí to Riosucio and from there they reached Turbo in a boat. In Turbo they took a bus to Medellín and then another one to Bogotá. All the interviewees agreed that the upper Atrato River was peaceful until 1996. Guerrilla groups used this area as a resting and

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<sup>129</sup> Organización Campesina del Bajo Atrato, Peasant Organization of the Lower Atrato River

<sup>130</sup> Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians for Resettlement and Return

<sup>131</sup> Womans Pacific Route

hiding spot. But when paramilitary forces entered in 1996, the region became a battlefield. Forced displacement in this area had been closely tied to the work led by the ACAMURI<sup>132</sup> an organization working on behalf of the collective entitlement of these lands.

### **The Tumaco Delta under Fire**

An extensive network of rivers and countless tributaries that originate on the western slopes of the Western Andean range of mountains creates the Patía Delta, an area that spread over 3,000 square kilometers in the South of the Colombian Pacific Coast in the border with Ecuador. Since the early 1990s, around the main port of Tumaco, African Palm cultivation, shrimp-farms, and cattle ranging became the main agro-business activities in this area. They were introduced as part of the economic plan of integration of the Colombian Pacific Rim to the international market. Land conflicts had been violent as capitalists shrimp-farmers destroyed mangrove swamps and let saltwater waste run onto peasant's farmland (Offen. Most of the shrimp-farmers were mostly whites and *mestizos* from outside the region, while local peasants were black.

During my fieldwork I met five women from Barbacoas a town located 40 km from Tumaco. They were all members of PCN who led the collective entitlement of lands and opposed the environmental damage that the company Palmas de Tumaco had caused in their territories. All my interviewees were activists in spite of the fact that their husbands were employees of that company.

This was a region in dispute between the FARC and the paramilitary groups. Since 2000, graffiti in the streets of Tumaco indicated the arrival of paramilitary groups who started their campaigns by killing people accused of being collaborators of the guerrillas,

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<sup>132</sup> Asociación Campesina del Municipio de Riosucio, Peasant Association of the Municipality of Riosucio.

such as community leaders and activists. In March 2001, thirty agricultural workers were disappeared. In June of the same year the army carried out a military operation called “Tsunami” aimed to eliminate the front 29 of the FARC and dismantle the laboratories of drug processing.

Elena was a community leader in Barbacoas, a town located in this area. For more than 25 years she had been a community leader, activist of the PCN. Since 1995, she organized protests and strikes to demand better education, electricity, water, and a road to connect Barbacoas with Tumaco. She was also a community mother (*madre comunitaria*) working with an NGO called Plan Padrino<sup>133</sup>, taking care of her grand-children and 25 children more from her community. As a health promoter she worked in the brigade against yellow fever and as a traditional healer, she knew the traditional medical use of herbs. Before she had to leave, her community got electricity, and a park. She was working on the collective entitlement of her town’s Community Council when she was threatened by paramilitary forces.

Despite the massacres and the political persecution against her family, she actually found that she could work well from Bogotá to help her community back home. Marién, her 26 years old daughter replaced her mother back home taking responsibility for the community child care house job that Helena had to abandon. However, soon she was also threatened by paramilitary forces. Both were sending money and clothes to their family at the time of the interviews. She would like to return home because she asserted that her community needed her. “A community needs someone that takes care and thinks on behalf of other people if we want to have development,” she said.

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<sup>133</sup> Plan Padrino is a NGO to sponsor poor children’s education

Pastora's life history illustrated the constant fleeing from one place to another due to conflict over land boundaries in the Southern Pacific. Her life was marked by loss and persecution. When she was a child, she lived in a big agricultural farm owned by her uncle. She remembered the abundance and variety of coconut, plantains, guava, pineapple, rice, and sugar cane they harvested and sold in the port of Tumaco. One day Pastora witnessed a young man stabbing her uncle in the stomach in a duel with *machetes* (long knives to cut the grass). She had to flee with her family and went to El Bolo to avoid retaliations. The police captured the man who killed him but released him after two years. At the time Pastora was living in El Bolo helping her aunt to run her shop. She mentioned the day when she was selling some cigarettes to a man that she recognizes as the killer when she was helping him. She and her family had to move again to Tumaco, the capital of the Province, and stayed there two years. Rumors in town said that the assassin was lifting each and every mosquito net of every house to find her. Her family decided to move to Buenaventura where her father had two brothers. In Buenaventura they lived for ten years. In that city she met her husband. The young couple decided to go back to Tumaco, moved by the desire to look over Pastora's inheritances. She remembered the guerrillas were already there at the time. She and her husband cultivated rice and coconut but they had to give part of the rice they produced as well as their cattle to the guerrilla. Her husband was tired of this situation and resisted giving them what they were asking. They killed him. She went back to Buenaventura. There she lived for four years but she realized that paramilitaries were recruiting and killing young people, even children. She was scared about her own children. One night they were watching TV when they knocked at the door. As she opened it, an armed group told her not to worry that they were doing *limpieza*. The day after, many neighbors' children were missing. They

even took people to the road, stopped the buses and ordered the driver to take them to Bogotá where they said the state would help them. After those events she decided to flee to Bogotá.

As an environmentalist and promoter of an alternative notion of development Elena represents an activist working around Law 70 of 1993 and as a community care-taker who flees massacres of her extended family to find support and new allies in Bogotá. The case of Pastora narrates the history of a non-activist woman who hides and flees from diverse armed groups who follow her throughout her entire life impeding her to recover her inherited lands from which she only has the prevalence of memories that symbolize the wealth of the southern Colombian Pacific Coast.

## **Conclusion**

The blessings and benefits that the 1991 Constitution that an interviewee called “the misfortune of good luck” (*la desgracia de la buena suerte*) have turned back against Afro-Colombian people living in the Pacific forests under the form of a bloody war that has stripped them from recently acquired collective lands. The arrival of paramilitary groups hand in hand with the arrival of timber and agro-business corporations thwarted a utopian cultural and ethnic project that had just been forged and consolidated at the local level. As part of an intensive reflection of what it means to be indigenous and Afro-Colombian in the context of contemporary Colombia, I showed how ethnic political organizations have gathered around an elaborated discourse of territory supported by the new citizenship status that these groups have enjoyed since the 1991 Constitution. This discourse argues that they are endowed with an alternative thinking and approach to life based on solidarity and collective social ties. Both groups, Afro-Colombian and indigenous, believe that forced



displacement has entailed cultural loss: loss of a territory conceived as a major social relation with nature and loss of a cultural place idealized as site of wealth and well-being. Both have undertaken utopian cultural projects aimed at rescuing historical and anthropological information of traditional times that would anchor the promises of their movements. Indigenous people present themselves as guardians of nature and possessors of a superior spiritual knowledge; Afro-Colombians as promoters of harmonious relations with the environment and holders of their own notion of development. With a messianic tone, these organizations invite the rest of Colombians to adopt a new spiritual way of thinking to oppose the mainstream conformity with the prevalent neo-liberal order.

## Chapter 5

### Reconstruction and the City

Internally-displaced people face the difficulties of incorporating themselves into legally regulated working relationships in a context in which unemployment reached 18% in Bogotá and 60% of its population was under the line of poverty in 2002 (DANE 2002). Only a minority of highly qualified sectors (especially the financial and the large-scale commercial sectors) seems to have benefited from the alleged wealth that neo-liberal adjustment policies of the early 1990s have produced. This corresponds to the contraction of formal employment and the growth of income inequality documented by Portes and Hoffman (2003) as a common pattern all over Latin America during the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s. In Colombia during that period informal activities distributed in commerce (45.3%), services (20%) and industry (18.2%) represented the main source of income for more than half of the urban labor population in Bogotá (Maldonado and Hurtado 1997). In 2002, more than half of internally displaced people affirmed that they were jobless and the rest had to work informally in the service sector: as street vendors, workers in farms near Bogotá, domestic servants, waged workers in the construction area, and as owners of small neighborhood shops to survive (Pérez 2004, RUT 2002).

In this chapter I argue that internally-displaced are helping to form a new type of informal urban labor market. By using ethnographic cases I demonstrate that an important way for displaced people to find economic insertion in the city is to get involved with NGOs, humanitarian organizations, healing practices, ecological projects and self-employment. Informal economy and micro-entrepreneurship activities constitute direct subsistence

activities to maintain social and economic connections with their hometowns or places of previous residence.

My analysis in this chapter focuses on various cases that demonstrate different practices of reinsertion that Andean rural workers, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian internally-displaced people use in order to start their lives over using the circuits of the informal economy and amplifying their social and political spheres. I argue that internally displaced people's possibility to remake their lives depend on their ability to move through different political and economic regimes that encompass city and countryside. Instead of a process of transition between two fundamentally different types of societies, resettlement means the use of multiple cultural repertoires and competences through which many of them find new spaces to act as defenders of human and ethnic rights. Some consider seriously the possibility of return. Others have expectations to stay temporarily in the city to save money and move back to their home-towns as part of their plans of retirement. Some decide to stay in the city and persist in their dreams of building and owning a house through community organizations and the advocacy of NGOs.

By looking at the process of internally displaced people resettling in the city of Bogotá, I am illustrating wider processes of urbanization through which Latin American cities have historically grown. Bogotá has always been a site where a multiplicity of regional cultures comes together and forges processes of re-territorialization (Sassen 1998). Moreover, the city of Bogotá connects various sites from every corner of Colombia that are not geographically proximate but are intensely connected to each other. It is the place where new notions of membership and entitlement take place, a center of opportunities, a space to escape political violence, and rural patron-client relationships.

From the perspective of internally displaced people's impermanence in their constant moving from one room to another, Bogotá is the place of scarcity, hardship as opposed to a past idealized as stable and wealthy. But from a long-term perspective, Bogotá also represents the myth of economic and social advancement, better education for the children, health services and, above all, the possibility of being connected to community organizations, humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and state institutions. The city is a strategic site for disempowered actors (Sassen 1998). Political and social contacts established in the city become social capitals of prestige, influence, respect, and recognition. The city represents liberation from armed repression but also imposes on people a different rhythm and pace of life mediated by money. Along with anonymity, many interviewees feel that they are no longer under armed groups' surveillance and that they recovered their peace.

I propose the term reconstruction instead of resettlement as a way to signal the renewed capability to address the future after displacement and to engage in politics against the ravaging effects of war. In contrast, resettlement has been commonly discussed in terms of adaptation, integration or assimilation whereas reconstruction refers to internally displaced people's practical engagements to be included within the city's everyday life. This process of reconstruction includes efforts to rebuild communities, strengthen bonds among survivors of war, imagine alternatives to the situations of scarcity, negotiate identities, and create new modes of affiliation.

In the first part of the chapter, I present several cases that illustrate how Andean rural men and women open political spaces through practices of *rebusque* in precarious conditions of existence. These are new spaces that people imagine and struggle for while remaining in unresolved and unstable situations. I describe three cases of women's organizations that join

human rights movements, look for funding, and work on topics such as self-esteem and emotional recovery, economic coping strategies, and housing projects. I finally present the case of a woman who participated in a challenging political take-over of the headquarters of the International Red Cross in Bogotá.

In the second part of the chapter, I will demonstrate how cultural authenticity becomes an unexpected and favorable attribute for indigenous groups to assert their ethnical rights in the city. Ethnicity seems to be the key for them to get institutional attention and resources. Instead of a persistence of rural traditions, people use the dominant ethnic categories and stereotypes to forge social networks (Ferguson 1999:88) and remake new versions of ethnic categories and stereotypes for use in urban life. The intentional use of markers such as the indigenous dress or the performance of practices such as shamanic cleansings and spiritual rituals constitute cultivated competences that constitute a new service sector of the city.

To illustrate the connection between city life and ethnicity, I present four cases to show the ways in which ethnic internally-displaced populations reinvent their own cultural utopias in the cities. Some indigenous groups offer magical healing services for the body and the soul, promote ecological tourism among urbanites, and introduce the production of sellable “cultural” items such as arts and crafts into global circuits of consumption. Afro-Colombians use the aesthetics associated with the stereotypes others have about them as tropical, joyful, and sensual to counter racist practices and gain the appreciation of the inhabitants of the peripheries where they arrive. They also dominate ethnic informal economic enclaves like food, barber shops, dance, and music.

## Informal Economy and *Rebusque*

Self-employment activities, micro-businesses, cooperatives, protective associations, and street selling constitute a wide variety of activities for internally displaced populations to solve their exclusion from the new urban labor structure. There is a word in Colombia, *rebusque*, which means to find a way out from difficulties and scarcity. It means also resourceful ways to get by and find a way out of economical difficulties. Many find the ways to cook meat pies, *tamales* or cakes and set up their stalls. Some wash their neighbor's clothes or pay their rent by cleaning and cooking. Men work carrying food bundles in the market places or what they call *bultear* which is an activity paid in exchange for the number of packages transported. Men often affirm "I do not run out of gas" (*Yo no me varo*) indicating their versatility and resourcefulness. A leader coming from the province of Caquetá who is selling the crops he is cultivating in his urban plot of land stated "people are finding their way out, they need to move, they cannot stay stunned" so they usually resort to informal jobs as street vendors selling wipes, arts and crafts, juices, and ethnic food:

What I have learnt has been a lot, that's why I do not run out of gas anywhere, I sell juices in Corabastos, as they have told me, you can lift bundles, because if I have the chance to find something. I know how to prepare the coast fruit salad, meat prickle. I have worked in restaurants, sea food pan, you must understand that we did not bring any cash with us. I can sell, coconut candies, *bollo limpio*, corn, bacon, plantain.<sup>134</sup> (man, 45 years old from Valledupar, Cesar)

As unskilled workers, internally-displaced people furnish labor force for micro-entrepreneurs who, in turn supply low-cost goods and services to formal sector enterprises (Portes and Hoffman 2003:50). In Bogotá, formal economic firms such as Quala S.A, Comcel, and Bell South hire unqualified workforce with unregulated work contracts through

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<sup>134</sup> Yo lo que he aprendido ha sido mucho, por eso es que no me varo en ninguna parte, vendiendo jugo, en Corabastos, como me dijeron, puede ponerse a cargar bultos, porque donde yo llegara a conseguir cualquier cosa, yo se hacer salpicón costeno, chuzo (pincho de carne), yo trabajé en restaurantes, cazuela de mariscos, no vé que quedamos sin cinco. Puedo vender cocadas, bollo limpio, bollo de mazorca, chicharrones, guineo verde.

hundreds of distributors to sell pre-paid cell-phone cards, ice creams, and accessories of all sorts all over the city. Quala distributors hire an increasing number of internally-displaced people to sell their famous ice-creams called Bon Ice in every city in Colombia. They provide each vendor with its uniform and a portable fridge. The distributors offer internally displaced and unemployed people low wages, no social security protection or social benefits for selling. This flexible form of economic activity provides their informal workers with some advantages like small investment, more personal interaction, the possibility of combining residential and working activities, and flexibility in work schedules.

Some women I interviewed said their strength to find a subsistence income came from having been raised in the countryside where everybody was used to work hard, day and night. They also said they have worked in almost every activity: “what haven´ t I done, I have worked in everything you can imagine.” The difference was that in the city they would have to work harder to get money. Back home one did not need money to get food, so interviewees said. In the city they had to be peddlers or street vendors at the stop lights because there were no more options for them. They would do whatever was within their reach to buy food for their families. At the beginning, it seemed impossible to work in the city. But later on, some of them managed to set up their own stall or micro-enterprise.

Since I got out from over there, I arrived to the city with 200.000 pesos and start to struggle to work selling meat pies on the street and from door to door and also desserts, and one family that saw that I had my small children and so, gave me to buy a stove and a pot, and with that I got to make *tamales*, it was an industrial gas stove.<sup>135</sup> (Woman, 50 years old, from Lejanías, Meta).

Rita had been displaced by war four years ago. She moved to Bogotá because she had a sister living in Fontibón, Bogotá. She thought the city dwellers rejected *campesinos* like her

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<sup>135</sup> Desde que salí de allá llegué aquí a la ciudad con 200.000 pesos y empecé a bregar a trabajar vendiendo empanadas en la calle puerta a puerta y pasteles, y una familia de verme así que tenía mis hijos pequeños y eso, me regaló para comprar una estufa y una olla, y con eso me puse hacer tamales, era una estufa industrial de gas.

because they are used to tell the truth upfront. She told me how she was hired temporarily as a passenger guide helping the users at the stop stations of the new public transportation system in Bogotá called *Transmilenio*. People from the City Hall liked her work because she never got tired. This was an opportunity to show them that what displaced people needed were more work opportunities:

They admired me a lot because I never got tired, so they said, and the young girls much younger than me exhausted, their feet hurting, that they were tired, that I don't know what. I never, never got to feel [tired], as they say, I have always been taught to be standing day and night.<sup>136</sup> (Woman, 59 years old from Urrao, Antioquia)

It was more difficult for men to get a job because their background as agricultural workers was not valued in the city. However, some of them got some part-time informal agreements with security companies, flower agro-industries located nearby Bogotá, and in the construction and auto-repair sectors. After displacement, men participated more on domestic chores and child care tasks whereas women learned very fast the strategies to obtain the material means necessary for their survival using their skills on domestic activities (Meertens 2001, 2002).

Nancy's mother and brothers were assassinated one year ago. At the beginning she lived at her sister-in-law's house. She has bought a plot of land in the district called Nueva Esperanza. Gustavo is the name of the man selling cheap plots of land there. She told me that, for now, she was washing clothes but if there was any other possibility to work in a construction area she was ready to work in it too because she had been taught to work like a man:

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<sup>136</sup> A mí me admiraron mucho que porque yo nunca me sentía cansada y las muchachas mas jóvenes rendidas de los pies, que estaban cansadas, que no se qué. Yo nunca, yo nunca me llegué a sentir, como se dice, siempre he vivido enseñada a vivir parada día y noche.



A: - In what do you think you could work now, besides washing clothes?

N: In wherever they give you a job, if I get a job, let's say that they are working in a building [project] and they need me, volunteer I will happily go because if I had to blend concrete, I blend it, if I have to lift bricks I will lift them, because I have been, like the story, I have been more macho for material work than to cook (she laughs) I do not know, I was raised, in fact doctor I am not lying, I have been raised like a macho, working, yes sir.<sup>137</sup> (Woman, 33 years, from Algeciras, Huila).

Despite the fact that temporary jobs in the informal economy do not offer them any welfare protection, women feel that they have acquired autonomy and expanded their social bonds in the city. Many imagine urban oriented life horizons with more opportunities for their children's education and the possibility of liberation from previous unequal gender relationships (Meertens 2000:118).

Nevertheless, some of my interviewees affirm they have been even forced to beg, a situation that produces shame. Claudia, a woman who converted to an evangelic group, has had a very hard time after being displaced. Muggers killed one of her sons in the neighborhood where they first stayed and then, later, her husband abandoned her. She told me that she had to fight alone and asked for money and for food in the central market called

CORABASTOS:

I have always been the one in front looking after my children; if perhaps had I had to leave them feel hungry it has been because of illnesses but the rest I have had to struggle for them seriously, to beg. I have had to ask for money to go and pay the rent, to pay the services, go out like this... that is terrible, very shameful, I feel ashamed to ask, sometimes the people said: - go work, why don't you work, so then one would say: - no, it is because we have been displaced and hopefully you would not have one day to have to go through that.<sup>138</sup> (woman from El Filo, Santander, 48 years old)

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<sup>137</sup> A: -Usted en qué cosa cree que podría trabajar ahora, pues aparte de lavar la ropa?

N: -En lo que lo coloquen a uno, si a mí me sale trabajo, que estén trabajando en construcción y a mí me necesitan, yo con mucho gusto voy porque si me toca revolver mezclas, yo las revuelvo, si me toca pasar ladrillos yo paso, porque yo he estado como el cuento, yo he sido más macho p'a trabajo material que p'a cocinar (she laughs) yo no sé, yo como me crié, en realidad doctor yo no le estoy mintiendo, yo me crié fue como un macho, trabajando, si señor

<sup>138</sup> (...) yo siempre he sido la que ha estado al frente que viendo de mis hijos; de pronto si los he dejado aguantar hambre [ha sido] por enfermedades pero el resto me ha tocado luchar por ellos gravemente, pedir

Practices such as auto-construction, this is the process of building one's own house, and setting up neighborhood shopping-stalls have been part of these practices of *rebusque* that poor Colombian migrants have used to make a living and claim a space in the city. Some of my interviewees had built many houses in their lives as *colonos* in rural areas and now they are engaged in building new houses as settlers in the periphery of Bogotá. On their own or led by political organizations, forced displaced people have invaded plots of land to build their own houses (Bello and Mosquera 1999).

As in almost every third-world city's periphery, there is a large illegal market of unoccupied plots of land offered for rent for amounts that vary from 40 to 60 dollars per month. Potential buyers have to give a deposit of 130 dollars and close the entire "business" of buying a plot with approximately 530 dollars. People linked to a swindler are in charge of offering the plots of land and they usually tell the buyers to occupy the house as fast as they can before other people invade it or the land's owner shows up. The only proof of purchase interviewees hold is a receipt. Internally displaced families who decided to use their savings to acquire land in the city moved to these plots of land that consists of a built hut connected to a light pole and to a water hose. Most internally-displaced people knew the techniques of building and improving houses. They said they knew how to prepare the holes to make the basis of the house and how to raise columns. They also knew that after several months they might save money to put up their own family business as street vendors or a small stall in the neighborhood. They also foresaw that after several years they will have their houses covered in concrete and bricks and may have two or three floors, as many of their neighbors had done for decades.

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limosna. Me ha tocado pedir plata para ir a pagar el arriendo, para pagar servicios, salir así (...) eso es terrible, mucha pena, a mí me daba mucha pena pedir, a veces la gente le decía a uno: - pues trabaje, por qué no trabaja, bueno, pues entonces ya uno decía: - no es que me desplazaron y ojalá usted no tenga un día que pasar por eso.

My research demonstrates that for many poor displaced communities, the invocation of a “lost space” and the claims for remaking place in the city become part of informal political and economic struggles that have been always used by other migrants to get housing. Most of my interviewees found that the payment of rent is humiliating. To build and own a house becomes interviewees’ priority as well as their recurrent dream. Contrary to assistance discourses that refer to displaced people as if they were dependent on an institutional power, in these cases I witnessed the creation of new possibilities by being-in-networks as the next section demonstrates (Escobar and Harcourt 2005).

### **Displaced Women’s Organizations**

Internally-displaced women’s new circumstances lead them to mobilize around their most urgent needs (housing, health, education, security) but also to seek their protection against war crimes. The tragedy of having disappeared, death, or kidnapped loved ones has led many women to organize with the purpose of disarticulating the logic of war and to favor life. In July 25, 2002 approximately 20,000 women from the Movimiento de Mujeres en Contra de la Guerra<sup>139</sup> organized a march from the Parque Nacional<sup>140</sup> to the Plaza de Bolívar<sup>141</sup> in Bogotá to demand the end of the Colombian conflict with the motto “we won’t give birth to any more of our sons to the war” (*no pariremos ni un hijo más para la Guerra*) (*El Tiempo* 2002:1-14). In August 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004 several of my interviewees participated in Bogotá of the Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres en Contra de la Guerra<sup>142</sup> organized by the

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<sup>139</sup> National Movement of Women Against War

<sup>140</sup> National Park

<sup>141</sup> Down town main square

<sup>142</sup> International Women Encounter Against War

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres por la Negociación Política de los Conflictos<sup>143</sup> and the Alianza Iniciativas de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz<sup>144</sup>. They worked on issues related to the big impunity that surround crimes of war, their processes of mourning, their need of psychological support and emotional recovery after experiences of terror and violence, and the creation of economic solidarity and survival projects. These women movements have been able to include their political agenda in the development plans of 48 municipalities as well as in the development plans of four provinces or departments. Based on resolution 1325, 2000 of the United Nations Security Council they have claim their inclusion in the future peace negotiations with armed groups. Under these women movements' pressure, the Colombian government has included gender as a central issue in its programs of humanitarian assistance.

This is the case of women organizations coming from the northern and southern Pacific towns such as Riosucio, Buenaventura and Cali. Women activate solidarity and organization networks when they feel identified with other women with similar losses and aspirations. Luz Amparo, a young Afro-Colombian leader, run an association of displaced women in Bogotá based on her life-time experience as a community leader. In her previous city of residence, Cali, she led the creation of a new district of the peripheries called Daniel Guillard. She had to move because she was in the list of people that paramilitary intended to kill. To reach Luz Amparo's house in Bogotá we had to walk the old colonial district of La Candelaria from where you see hundreds of old Spanish tiles-roofed small houses spreading out down the hill. Our guides, two of Luz Amparo's sons, run and climbed endless stairs that

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<sup>143</sup> Women Pacific Route for the Political Negotiation of Conflicts

<sup>144</sup> Alliance of Colombian Women's Initiatives for peace

led us to the small unpaved corridor that separated her house from the others and arose in three small floors of the district called El Rocío.

As on every Saturday, Luz Amparo's house was packed with people. Nubia, a political leader from the alternative political party called Frente Social y Político<sup>145</sup>, was visiting her. Both Nubia and Luz Amparo were members of a human rights movement called Iniciativas de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz<sup>146</sup> created in 1994. Later, I learned that Nubia was the person who gave Luz Amparo an oven to make cakes, one of the many activities she ran from her house. I also found out several months later that Luz Amparo was able to get global recognition for her peace-building and economic recovery programs for internally-displaced people and therefore had been included along with other 1000 women in the list of the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize nominees.

The day of our interview, a university team of instructors was about to leave her house. Luz Amparo greeted them as she said: "You were the ones who were supposed to teach me but instead you ended up learning from me, right?"<sup>147</sup> We were invited to sit in one of few free spaces near a long table where she had on display all kind of arts and crafts. Some of the affiliates invited us to teach us how to prepare the dew out of glue, wheat and soap that they used to make the different models of their manual creations. Among many figures I found particularly interesting an Afro-Colombian doll dressed in a very elegant red night gown with prominent curves of her hips. The features of that little doll remind me of widespread stereotypes that I have been told are used to sexualize Afro-Colombians.

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<sup>145</sup> Social and Political Front

<sup>146</sup> Peace Initiatives from Colombian Women

<sup>147</sup> "Ustedes se suponía que me iban a enseñar pero en cambio ustedes terminaron aprendiendo de mí, ¿no' cierto?"

A few minutes later, Luz Amparo invited us to sit on the terrace of her house. From there we had the most incredible view of the city: that day, the eastern hills had that very dark green color that made them look sinister and we felt the chilly but refreshing breeze that came directly to us. Luz Amparo told us of the convenience of living near downtown Bogotá, pointing out with her finger the offices of the Social Solidarity Network, and the Ministeries that she usually visited and the shop called *Cachivaches* where she was selling the artcrafts and ornaments that she and the women of her association produced. With the money they made they invested buying new material or using the money in case that any of her affiliates had an emergency situation.

She explained to me how she had proceeded to create her association: first she visited the applicants who are willing to join her organization; that way she confirmed that they were in charge of single mother's households in need of economic support; then, she asked them what activities they did best for a living. In this way, she succeeded in organizing and mobilizing the human potential she found among her fellows:

I start telling them: What do you want? So they answered me: Ay, I don't have a job, ay, I do not. - Which kind of things do you know? That I know how to make purses. - You know how to make purses and you are unemployed?- What about you, what do you know? I know knitting. Because the thing that I have done is that I go and get into the people's houses and if you tell me: - I am not doing well, I go to your house to see if it is true (...) because lots people know how to use the "I am not doing well" to take other people as milk cows (...) You have to start on from what you know to do, you start from scratch. I went to another (woman's house):- What do you have there? - Ah no I have these threads... How can it be possible that you are having hunger! That you are having a hard time, that you don't have money to pay the rent, when what you have here is an investment, you have the raw material to start working. Put yourselves to work and we are going to sell it! (Woman from Cali, Valle, 48 years old)<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Empecé a decirles: - ustedes qué quieren? Entonces todas me decían:-Ay, yo no tengo trabajo, ay yo no. - Usted qué saber hacer? Que yo sé hacer bolsos. -Y usted sabe hacer bolsos y está sin trabajo? - Usted qué sabe? - Yo sé tejer.Pero el cuento que yo he manejado es que yo me meto a la casa de la gente y si usted me dice: - yo estoy mal, yo voy a su casa a ver si es verdad (...) porque hay mucha gente que maneja el `yo estoy mal´ para coger a las otras personas como vaca lechera(...) Usted tiene que arrancar de lo que usted sabe, usted arranca de cero. Iba donde la otra. - Que usted qué sabe hacer? Que yo sé tejer; camine vamos a su casa. - Usted qué tiene

There are up to a hundred grass-root organizations of displaced women in Bogotá that extend solidarity networks and set up survival and reconstruction strategies. These include community cooking, affiliation to social movements, juridical advisory to teach displaced people how to use the *tutela* and the right of petition to claim their rights as displaced people, activation of national and international networks of support and political mobilization. Women associations often affiliate displaced women from the same towns, claiming for a dignified house and a job

Amanda, assisted forced displaced people from the province of Meta, the region where she was working as a community leader when she was expelled. She ran her own organization ASINTEFACAH<sup>149</sup> in a small apartment in downtown Bogotá that a university student has agreed to sublet to her during the day. Amanda and her assistant, Margarita, invited me to sit at the dining table where they had piled and classified the files of their affiliates under the names of their programs: “single mothers,” “elderly,” “productive programs,” and “housing project.” They showed me the Christmas ornaments they made to sell and they told me they were seeking funds for this year’s presents for their affiliates’ children. Amanda was leading a housing project called Villa Hermosa that consisted of 1500 houses designed with the help of some architects she contacted in Bogotá. For now, Amanda would start building 250 houses for her affiliates in a plot of land that she was looking at the day I visited her. Her financial situation was very tough and she had to sell her belongings, including her bed, and move to a smaller room to keep her organization alive. But she would invoke her favorite saints, Santa Marta, the Saint Trinity, and the Hindu Army all together.

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aquí? - Ah no, pues tengo todos estos hilos. - Cómo así que usted está aguantando hambre! que ustedes están pasando trabajo, que no tienen p’ a pagar el arriendo, cuando usted tiene aquí una inversión, tiene una materia prima para usted trabajar. - Póngase a hacer eso y lo vendemos.

<sup>149</sup> Asociación Nacional de Familias Cabezas de Hogar Amanecer Social Colombiano, National Association of Single Mothers’ Households.

She would have a serious talk with them. “Pónganse buenos” (get good to me), she said, meaning that she will ask them to do something right now to help her. Instead of invoking the state, Amanda feels that by resorting to her most powerful patron-saints she will keep the promises she had made to her affiliates.

Luz Amparo’s case demonstrates the resourcefulness of an experienced activist who had worked her entire life building networks, with NGOs and human rights organizations. Through her women’s association she was able to mobilize a large number of women that shared the same experience as displaced women. Luz Amparo’s association had not only an important economic role to restore economic livelihoods and supporting dependants of all her affiliates’ households but she had also a political agenda: family and development for her were two main principles to change society. Her association had a big political impact fusing with human rights movements and parties that form part of a global political women’s movement against war. Amanda’s case also illustrates the experience of a strong community leader who was able to organize vulnerable internally displaced populations around a big housing project. By writing letters in which she asked for funds to an endless list of international and national donors and by participating of every political event involving displaced people she carried out an important political work despite the fact that the sustainability of her association is constrained.

Taller de Vida is a woman organization located in the traditional district of La Soledad created by displaced women who were members of the left UP party and teachers in their home-towns from the Caribbean Coast during the 1990s. With the support of FECODE<sup>150</sup>, Terre des Hommes<sup>151</sup>, and CODHES, they created an organization to

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<sup>150</sup> Federación Colombiana de Educadores, Colombian Federation of Educators



reconstruct emotional networks of support as well as economic projects to sustain recently internally displaced women and their children. Taller de Vida's main interests had been to work on emotional recovery based on artistic and therapeutic activities instead of denunciation because they believed that victims of war would be able to empower themselves by recovering autonomy after experiences of forced displacement. They opposed assistance and charity because, according to them, such practices often resulted in forms of mendacity and marginality. Instead, they offered a monthly stipend to the women who worked as members and employees of the foundation. They had regular psychological therapy meetings, dance sessions and workshops. Instead of the productive projects offered by the state, women and young people in Taller de Vida had found that through artistic creativity they could get a source of income. They made cards, paintings, wooden art and crafts, mirrors, and ornaments that they sold to European human-rights organizations. They had acquired all the supplies for their work manual activities as well as all the equipment including TV, film-recorders, DVD, stereo for the boys and girls of their households who had created theater and dance groups and went to Europe every year to make their presentations. One of the founders of the organization highlighted the fact that their foundation was doing well because they had kept their principles of collective solidarity and had not adopted narrow-minded business oriented tests on feasibility, viability or productivity that many other organizations advised them to follow. Reconstruction for them meant to fight against the destructive and disabling effects of violence understood as a technique of silencing and repression. Heidi, director of Taller de Vida, validated this political stance in her own terms:

We have to do something to strengthen ourselves as families, as persons. We have to do something to avoid that violence takes away from us the possibility of

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<sup>151</sup> Men's Land

being persons with decision and action. Violence takes away that because it instills in you all the resentment, all the pain and sadness and then you have a hard time interacting and relating to others.<sup>152</sup> (Interview Taller de Vida, October 2002)

The case of Taller de Vida constituted an economically successful story of a group of women who decided to create a foundation based on principles of solidarity and the right of freedom of expression, autonomy and psychological recovery of internally displaced women. As a unique experience of an entrepreneurial initiative with a strong community impact, they were awarded the international ASHOKA<sup>153</sup> prize. This award has given them the recognition to be able to use the circuits of international humanitarian agencies through which they sell their arts and crafts, cards, furniture, and decorative objects. They also relied on the support of international agencies of cooperation that enabled them to run their own assistance projects on displacement and recovery.

Myriam was an associate of Taller de Vida coming from the Urabá region. She left because armed actors recruited one of her sons. She ran away to save her younger son. She worked in Taller de Vida making hand-made postcards to be sent and sold abroad. She told me she could finally pay a dental treatment to fix her teeth and she was very happy about it. She had been taking care of her personal appearance (something she has never done) because this was the key to open new job opportunities. In the foundation Taller de Vida internally displaced women created a system of purchasing clothing that responded to their wish to dress like executive women who go to work. The foundation received and selected very good clothing from donations provided by international religious and humanitarian institutions and

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<sup>152</sup> Hay que hacer algo para fortalecernos como familias, como personas. Y que la violencia no nos niegue la posibilidad de ser personas con decisión y acción. La violencia te niega eso porque instaura en tí todo el resentimiento, el dolor, la tristeza y a tí te cuesta luego interactuar y relacionarte.

<sup>153</sup> Ashoka is the global association of the world's leading social entrepreneurs. Is represented by the oak tree. Strong sturdy tree, the oak represent the power of Asoka's commitment and contribution to the training of social entrepreneur

women sold them among themselves at a very low cost. That way, they felt they were able to pay their clothes again. With their salaries they also purchased the items they considered important to recover: pots, bed sheets, T.V, and their beds. Some other women said they wished they could dress fashionably, but for now, they had to conform and wear the same old clothes or the same torn-hill shoes.

### **Takeover of the International Red-Cross Headquarters<sup>154</sup>**

In December 1999, two hundred displaced people took over the International Red Cross building located in the upscale area of Bogotá called *Zona Rosa*, famous for its restaurants, hotels, and bars. They kept 37 Red-Cross functionaries as hostages. The takeover lasted three years during which these displaced families benefited from 3.000 million pesos (1'271,000 dollars approximately) in humanitarian aid and housing subsidies provided by the Social Solidarity Network, according to a newspaper report (*El Tiempo* November 6, 2002 and December 22, 2002). In December 2002, the Public Prosecutor Office put an end to this occupation and 26 displaced families and other people who were not internally displaced people were expelled from the building peacefully.

Pastora was one of the persons who participated in the take over of the Red-Cross headquarters in December 1999. There she stayed until February 2000. She had to leave because she and her children were getting sick. She told me that the apartments were packed with people who kept pouring in. It was dangerous to stay because people got into fights. People who organized that seizure were telling them that they were going to fight for their rights of having housing, and education.

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<sup>154</sup> Internally-displaced people have led seizures of the UNHCR, RSS, Ombudsman, ICRC office in the city of Bogotá (Meertens 2002:50).

Compelled by the Constitutional Court Sentence The RSS revised and rectified each and every one of the protesters' cases and registered them accordingly. Pastora extended her declaration before that office to be eligible for a renewed economic assistance. The employees of the RSS advised Pastora and other protesters not to follow their leaders. According to them the leaders were only looking for their individual benefits. The state promised her three months of rent and three months of household provisions. But it did not keep its word and she received only two months of rent and one month of groceries.

The case of the Red Cross shows how a group of internally displaced people decided to resort to an extreme form of protest with international impact to make their voices heard and to complain about the lack of state assistance despite law 387, 1997. Outside leaders that were not displaced people infiltrated the organization and persuaded the protesters to remain in the offices invaded. They manipulated the protest and obtained only for them all the economic benefits and compensations granted by that law.

### **Spiritual and Ecological Movements in Bogotá**

The following case illustrates how the practices related to a recovery of an indigenous spirituality and the spread of an ecological consciousness become part of a messianic-like movement in the city through which internally-displaced indigenous people from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta promoted their traditional knowledge. They know very well that many urbanites want to learn about their ways of life, their spiritual knowledge and their ecological management of the environment.

For Kankuamo indigenous groups, the city had been an escape from selective persecutions and killings and it was definitely safer than "home." In Bogotá there was less

political corruption than in the provincial towns where any assistance would be conditional on connections with political patrons. In Bogotá they found financial support, especially from international donors. If in the provincial capital they were not well appreciated, they felt that in Bogotá they were respected and valued as indigenous people. Moreover, being in Bogotá represented a valuable experience in their leadership training.

In the city they got to know various other indigenous groups that, like them, organized around the claiming and assertion of special constitutional rights. Their everyday life consisted of visiting donor organizations and public offices (Presidencia<sup>155</sup>, Ministerio del Interior, RSS) to get to know “how things were going.” As they said, “they liked to go and tap the head of power” meaning that they liked to talk to the central power directly without intermediaries.

Parallel to their commitment to the Kankuamo indigenous organization project of re-ethnization, most of the young leaders were studying in Bogotá and think that it was a good opportunity to be sharing with non-indigenous people, learning from them, and sharing their knowledge on “mental and social ecology” with those who were interested in knowing about indigenous mentality. Using agreements established with the universities where they were studying they had identified old pre-hispanic sites like the lake Guatavita and the Monserrate Hill, and transformed them into sacred places of the Bogotá high plateau where they organized projects of ecology and educational tours aimed at protecting the basins of the rivers that surrounded the city. They have built a ritual house or *maloka* located in Chía only 15 km from Bogotá where they promoted spiritual cleansing sessions accompanied by the performance of rituals that teach urbanites how to reconnect with nature. They presented the

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<sup>155</sup> Presidency Office

tours as “spiritual journeys into themselves” in enchanted realms where visitors would be able to acquire a sensibility towards cultural rituals and nature.

Inversely, some of them mentioned that one of the few positive things about displacement was the possibility of forgetting for a moment where they were from and sharing experiences with other people. Some of them had found their vocation as writers or artists and had been able to publish work thanks to the support that intellectual and activists groups had offered them in Bogotá. Joking, they said that the city had disciplined them, referring to their former disorganized and relaxed lifestyle and the strict and disciplined routines they had had to adopt in the city in pursuit of a living.

However, most of them used the urban-rural dichotomy to talk about the city. The city for them was dehumanized and cold as cement as opposed to the beauty of the nature they respected and worshiped. In their rooms in the old quarter of La Candelaria district, they said they lived behind locked doors due to insecurity and crime. Urban regimes of cash marked their experience of mobility in the city. They had to pay rent and move constantly from one room to another whereas before, they never paid to move to work or visit their family members. Some mentioned the animals they used to move around or the pirogues driven by family members or friends who did not charge them for a trip. In Bogotá they had to pay to go everywhere and many of them were used to walk the city to save money and be able to attend meetings and workshops that were part of their daily agendas. One central spatial referent for them within the city was the recently implemented system of transportation called *Transmilenio* which they called *transdemonio* (trans-devil). This word symbolized the way in which they talked about the new public transportation system as a powerful evil force that formed part of their everyday routines as new urbanites but a novelty

that they had to despise to comply with their obligations to the preservation of their tradition. As opposed to the wide spaces and the sense of freedom they said they had back in their territories, they felt enclosed in rooms that they described as small cages or “match boxes.”

Among the stylistic practices through which Kankuamo people asserted their process of cultural strengthening they used the white traditional one-piece dress called *makeka*. However, during the workshops they mentioned they were told not to wear it anymore for security reasons as they might become military targets in the streets. With humor they said that, if before they used their traditional woven bags (*mochilas*) to carry avocados, *bollos* (cakes), and blocks of brown sugar, in Bogotá they carried cell phones crucial for their communication and their safety in the city. Women had even started to weave special small woven bags especially designed to carry their cell phones. They also carried their wooden recipient with a little stick that they used to think while chewing coca leaves, mentioning with grace that it was their personal identity item, similar to the western ID card they were constantly requested to show when the police frisk them on the streets. Some women in the workshops mentioned precious items called *cuentas*, necklaces made of small colorful stones blessed by the *mamas* as protections against witchcraft that they wore in the city.

Food was a central element of discussion about their lives in the city because, as they said, the food that was affordable in the city was polluted and deprived them of sexual power. That was why they were spreading the word about clean food, clean consumption and traditional medicine. Their discourse formed part of wider social movement that claimed the right to food (*seguridad alimentaria*) based on the traditional practices of production of seeds, clean and healthy agriculture, and the defense of vegetable and animal native species. As part of the strengthening of native culinary traditions, they made efforts to cook

traditional food such as the *guisado de bocachico* and the *mondongo* soup, with the ingredients and seasonings they were sent from home (*ayo*, brown sugar, meat, lentils, and *churro*). From Bogotá they regularly sent remittances such as greetings, jackets, coats, shoes, and boots.

Kankuamo interviewees affirmed that city dwellers perceived them as *mestizos* from the Caribbean Coast (*costeños*) due to their accent and manners. They stressed their differences from the *cachacos*<sup>156</sup> mentioning they were noisy and joyful rather than bitter like Bogotánians. They mentioned that when they were in public spaces they liked to break the icy and sad atmosphere with their accent and their jokes. They perceived people from Bogotá as distrustful, but as “people, once they know you, they offer you trust.” As opposed to people from Bogotá, they liked to party at home and not in the discos of the city. Sharing the alcoholic beverage sent from home called *chirrinchi*, they tried to get together despite the fact that their neighbors complained about their parties and they had been asked to end their meetings early.

In contrast, older leaders emphasized that the compliance with their traditions and customs constituted the strength of their organization. Therefore, some of them rejected those who were becoming westernized: “today they want to put sweaters on us and very soon we will be dressed up with ties” said Diomedes ironically alluding to the dress used by city office men and bureaucrats. Members of the Kankuamo group said that if they found someone from their group speaking *cachaco* (accent of the people from Bogotá) they would beat him with a stick alluding to the traditional way of punishment. “They cannot lose their uses and customs,”<sup>157</sup> they insisted. “The problem is not a problem of whites, black or

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<sup>156</sup> Name given the people from the Central Andean part or interior including the city of Bogotá

<sup>157</sup> “Ellos no pueden perder sus usos y costumbres”



Indians: there are many indigenous dressed in indigenous clothes who have a white mentality and there are many whites dressed in white clothes who have an indigenous mentality”<sup>158</sup>. Saying this, they asserted that being indigenous was to respect nature, be spiritual and act according to the tradition.

In November, 2002, Kankuamo displaced indigenous groups presented before the UNHCR the project called “Organization and cultural strengthening and self-generating income for displaced indigenous in Bogotá.” They were determined to organize and demonstrate that they were useful and that all they needed were funds to start a cooperative of crafts-men and women. With the funds obtained from UNHCR, FONADE<sup>159</sup> and SENA they supported the first 10 months of their project directed to generate incomes through the selling of arts and crafts such as earrings, bracelets, baskets, wood and woven artifacts. Inspired on the model of cooperativism, indigenous groups from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and from the Tolima Province, set up the group called Serankua. This is the name given to one of the two *mamas* that, according to the Arhuaco tradition, created the world and distributed lands and seeds for the survival of humanity. Some of them refuse to sell their original designs of woven bags called *mochilas* because these have a spiritual symbolic meaning that cannot be commodified. However, they decided to create new designs and adjust to the demands and tastes of their city clients.

They talked about the plan to get a spot in CORFERIAS, the biggest arts and crafts international fair in the country. The days I visited their locale in the old district called La Candelaria, I was very surprised to find among the pottery on display some houses made of ceramic with a Spanish style and an innovative stylistic feature: large rectangular houses with

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<sup>158</sup> El problemas no es de blancos, negros o indios; hay muchos indígenas vestidos con ropas indígenas que tiene mentalidad blanca y hay muchos blancos vestidos con ropas de blanco que tienen mentalidad indígena”

<sup>159</sup> Fondo Nacional del Ahorro, National Fund of the Saving

various floors. The idea of the cooperative they wanted to set up was to prevent that Kankuamo fellows ended up begging on the streets of the city for lack of support, a situation of the Emberá internally-displaced indigenous group.

The case of the Kankuamo community of internally displaced people illustrates the tension that members of this community felt between their duty to follow their tradition and the demands of city residents that had given them the role of holders of an “indigenous spirituality.” Among the new people they had met there they found wisdom seekers, people who wanted to become indigenous, and people who wanted to look beyond their cultural western lenses (Povinelli 2002). Although they were not spiritual priests or *mamas* they were willing to talk about how to fight the pains and evils of western civilization. At the same time, in Bogotá they found easier than in their province to commercialize their arts and crafts within global networks.

### **Neo-shamans in the city**

Internally displaced people from the Amazon, especially recently arrived Inga migrants from the Amazon province of Putumayo, affirmed they have brought from the forest an incredibly rich healing power based on their ecological knowledge of their territory. Urban dwellers are seeking their services to solve ailments attributed to the current global economic system.

Climbing hundreds of stairs of a social welfare housing complex built in the 1970s called Ciudadela Santa Rosa, I found Victor Jacanamijoy’s small green house perched on the eastern hills of Bogotá. Victor is a shaman who belongs to a prominent Inga family. One member of that family is a very famous Colombian painter who resides in New York. And

another one is member of the senate. Then I understood why Victor has mentioned that indigenous in the city live in “one-room houses with a door.” Victor told me that he had his own orchard with medical plants behind the Monserrate hill where he was growing some sacred herbs that needed to be picked fresh. He also raised *cuyes* in the terrace of his small house because these animals were considered like plants or cattle for them.

In Bogotá, Victor organizes *tomas de yagé* a 10,000 years old Amazon indigenous ritual, according to him. His clients included groups of professionals, students, politicians, and TV stars interested in purging themselves, looking inwards, or finding a meaning in their lives. Some years ago it was a very secret practice. Today everybody in Bogotá wants to sign in for a *yagé* session. *Yagé* is a beverage made of two medical plants: *ayahuasca* leaves and *chagropanga* leaves. They are hallucinogenic and medicinal plants. The therapeutic program that Victor organizes includes a diet before and after the drinking, a session of meditation and yoga postures, a walk with a session of sacred and circular dances and a session called “awakening the senses,” the drinking of *yagé* that might produce a trance in the patients, and the cleansing of the body from all kind of diseases. During this ritual Victor wears the traditional blue dress of the Inga tribe, his magnificent crown of feathers and three necklaces with tiger teeth and seeds accumulated over decades. He poured a beverage in a cup as he whispered prayers and agitated a bundle of leaves of *uhaira sachá* (leaves from the tree of the wind) used to clean its content from bad influences. Victor asserted that what people experience during the drinking of *yagé* were not hallucinations but visions about their own body and soul’s healing process.

Using family ties, Inga indigenous group of internally displaced arrive to the central parts of downtown Bogotá where a community of approximately 2,500 people live in rooms

that they rent, paying per day or per month. They have been selling traditional healing products as street vendors through commercial circuits built up from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They run their shops with esoteric and magical items in the market place called Caravana located in downtown Bogotá. Inga indigenous groups have acquired the reputation of being the best shamans from the Amazon area, possessors of a powerful magical knowledge about luck, fortune, money, love, and witchcraft. Their products include an incredible variety of items that go from beads, necklaces, blessed amulets, necklaces made of seeds, animals' teeth, feathers, and all kind of beverages that heal incurable diseases.

During one of the interviews, an internally displaced Inga leader told me that they have come to the city with their “bags of medicines.” They arrived due to war but they could survive using their healing knowledge; they were not beggars, they brought culture and knowledge. He asserted that their lives consisted of always moving due to their business activities. They had always traveled to find money. But this did not mean they forgot their piece of land or *chagra* where they cultivated and combined herbs and plants. In fact their main plan for retirement had been to go out to the cities, saved some money selling their medical products and secured their *chagras* in the Sibundoy Valley to prepare their plots when they got old. Lately it had been more difficult for them to undertake such plans because the armed conflict in the province of Putumayo had reached an utmost point. He took his daughters once in a while to visit his parents' house so that they did not forget how to cultivate the land and share the harvest. Both of his daughters were attending the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá.

The Inga community of internally-displaced people has relied on a dense kin network of healers that dominate the economic enclave of the esoteric and magic market of downtown

Bogotá including millennial ritual practices like the recently commodified *toma de yagé*. Perceived as “authentic” indigenous healers, their practices have acquired the status of medical practices that respond to an increasing urban quest for healing and salvation. Indigenous healers in the city offer a combination of New Age and meditative practices to help urbanites to cope with the diseases of capitalism and the negative effects of modernity such as greed, anxiety, insecurity, and narcissism.

### **The Creation of the Cabildo Ambiká in Bogotá**

Concerned by a sentence issued by the state Oficina de Asuntos indígenas del Ministerio del Interior stating that Pijao groups displaced from their territories automatically lose their indigenous juridical rights, Pijao internally- displaced people joined the political movement that former Pijao migrants initiated to claim an indigenous space in the city of Bogotá. They were engaged in recovering their indigenous tradition. By writing their history of struggle over lands, recovering their oral history inscribed in the landscapes of their territory, and their medical and culinary practices, the Pijao community in Bogotá validated their politics of cultural difference.

The Pijao indigenous group has strong historical bonds with Bogotá. Their *resguardo* is located only 4 hours from Bogotá by road. They have always being migrants traveling back and forth from Bogotá to the Tolima province. The Pijao community lives in various southern districts of the city of Bogotá like Ciudad Bolívar, Usme, Bosa and San Cristóbal. Since 2001, when paramilitaries arrived to the southern part of the Tolima province, an increasing number of internally-displaced people have resettled using their kin ties. Organized around the cabildo called Ambiká, they called me to represent their claims before

state representatives from the Oficina de Asuntos indígenas del Ministerio del Interior in order to get the indigenous jurisdiction of their Cabildo before the Bogotá City Hall. The Pijao community was petitioning for a revision of a previous concept of that office affirming that the Pijao indigenous people did not constitute “a real indigenous community” in Bogotá. I helped them to write a document based on reports that various leaders and members of the *cabildo* prepared to prove that they were “real” indigenous people who had been expelled by force from their territories. The state argued that in order to qualify for the status of indigenous they had to prove that they were recent residents of their recognized territory in the province of Tolima. Urban migrants would lose their special rights as indigenous people if they were not certified as ethnical group according to standards established by the state.

The negotiations for the Pijao ethnic group to be recognized as *cabildo* started in 2002. Other indigenous groups have been given such indigenous jurisdiction and traditional authorities within the city such as the *Cabildo* Inga and the *Cabildo* of Bosa. The state denied the Pijao group that jurisdiction stating that they had lost their culture, they lived in a “disperse manner” in the city, individually and not collectively as indigenous are supposed to live. The state argued they did not have any proof of social cohesion and that by living in the city they had lost their authentic values, traits and customs. The state stated that they did not form a community in the city of Bogotá because they lived very far from each other and therefore could not fully practice their “indigenusness.” Pijao members of the *Cabildo* Ambiká decided to present themselves to the state as a group endowed with essential cultural traits. They needed to appear distinct and different from peasants of the department of Tolima where they come from by writing their history, highlighting their main cultural traits and paradoxically, hiding their urban skills as construction workers. They had to show they

were agriculturalists although they were hired as assistants of former Pijao migrants who worked for constructing firms in the city. They had to show that they were in a process of recovery of the tradition in order to be considered eligible for the state to certify them as indigenous people.

As part of the project presented to the office of Indigenous Affairs they proposed to build a museum to show the urban visitors various aspects of their culture: the way they cultivated, prepared traditional meals and beverages (*chicha*), and built their houses. In the text including the principles of functioning of their cabildo they wrote the main goals of their political organization:

1. To keep the cohesion of the community who resides in Bogotá in order to recover the authentic traditions and customs by organizing Pijao festivities in Bogotá.
2. To execute development projects based on arts and crafts activities and ethnical food businesses and cooperatives.
3. The cabildo will support recently arrived Pijao displaced people.
4. They will build a *maloka* in Usme, the district where a majority of them live, to revive their traditional political organization.
5. They would like to be able to apply their own indigenous system of justice.
6. They want to create a program of ethnic education with teachers that would teach their children their myths of creation, tales and legends.

The *Cabildo Ambiká's* appeal to their special indigenous jurisdiction illustrates how the assertion of constitutional rights of ethnic groups becomes a new objective of indigenous recently arrived to Bogotá. By presenting themselves as authentic indigenous people they proposed a program that draws on common goals and discourses of the rest of Colombian

indigenous organizations today: recovery of tradition, ethnical education, the possibility of cultivating their plots of land again as part of their right to a clean production of food, and the recovery of culinary traditions. Aware of *mestizo* urban visitors being interested in “seeing” and learning about indigenous “arts” and “culture” they propose the building of a museum and a ritual house or *maloka*, the place for their future gatherings, meetings and teaching courses.

### **Afro-style in Bogotá**

Finally, I will describe the economic enclaves where displaced Afro-Colombians have found temporary jobs, emphasizing the stylistic aspects of their everyday life to show how important performances are for their successful reinsertion in Bogotá. Then I will present two vignettes that describe the place where two families of Afro-Colombians live in the peripheries of Bogotá and how, like any other migrants, they have purchased houses and renovated them.

Afro-Colombian displaced people reactivate their kin ties to help each other in the city. When they get housing, they offer it to recently arrived kin, godfathers and god mothers’ members of their families. Through these networks, forced migrants find temporary jobs usually in the same activities of their sponsors. Those who occupy a prominent position among political organizations do better in terms of getting housing and employment. They might use their political networks that operate from the municipalities they come from to the capital to get an arranged job in public state offices. People working with Afro-Colombian organizations in Bogotá stress their cultural difference within a close knit of relationships called *la paisanada* whereas other people who might be affiliates prefer to mingle with



people from various origins and hide or modify their accent and the way they address the locals (Mosquera 1998).

Interviewees said that wherever they were they would remain united, in contact with each other. They found that people from Bogotá did not keep in touch and got lost from each other. They complained that they did not even know their neighbors, because everybody lived in the city with their doors closed. They said that among Bogotánians there was a lot of distrust, they were hypocrite, asocial, racists and with no solidarity. In the meantime, it was this city that offered them big opportunities in terms of jobs or a good education for their children. Most of the women I met had to work as maids or janitors in the city, activities that they critiqued when they worked as political leaders in their home-towns.

The reinsertion in the city is a dynamic process of identity negotiation. Afro-Colombians manipulate the dualisms such as interior/coast, tropical/Andean, hot weather/cold weather that urbanites used to acknowledge their cultural distinctiveness. City residents have associated black population with parties, open manifestations of happiness, loud verbal interactions, erotism, corporal freedom, and relaxed interactions. Recently arrived Afro-Colombians used this exoticism and its associated aesthetics drawing on what the *mestizo* and white population considered “tropical” colorful, and tasty, to sell their products on the street or to present themselves with the sensuality that others attribute to them. They sold “ethnic food” fruits like *chontaduros*, mangoes with salt, coconut and *cocadillas* (coconut cookies) drawing on their peculiar ways to prepare this food but also the contacts back home from where they were sent fruits and seasonings. Working as street peddlers they felt that the city hall strict measures directed towards the protection of the public space which banned informal street selling jeopardized their right to work. Many

forced black migrants found that as informal street vendors they did better than when they got temporarily hired as construction workers or door keepers in the case of men or as maids and domestics in the case of women.

Some Afro-Colombian internally-displaced people got hired through family ties to work on the restaurants and fisheries of downtown Bogotá owned by internally-displaced people who arrived more than five years ago. These places are usually decorated with icons of tropicalness, such as palm trees, sea waves, beaches and giant lobsters tapping into the imageries people from the *interior* have of the Pacific Coast. When the customers they serve come from the province of Chocó, bartenders say they don't have to explain anything from the menu. In contrast, they have to adequate the meals to some of their customers' preferences from Bogotá who look for the "real" Chocoan food by putting in less of the traditional seasoning (Godoy 2003). These clients are certain that people from the Chocó Province are the ones who know best how to cook fish in the entire city.

There is a mall in downtown Bogotá called Galaxentro where Afro-Colombians internally-displaced people get hired in restaurants and barber shops. In that mall, they have extended into the corridors of the mall appropriating this public space and calling it *la Calle Chocoana* (street from Chocó). They have put chairs and tables to eat, play domino, dance, chat, and get information about their kin and friends, to know if the celebrations went well, to diffuse news and discuss all the political, economic and social events run by Afro-Colombians in Bogotá (Meza 2002).

Barber shops and beauty shops constitute their economic enclave too. There, black men specialize in the art of haircutting, offering elaborate designs and styles such as dreadlocks, congos, bongos, rap buns, and braids. Their shops form multifunctional spaces

that offer the possibility for the migrants to encounter *paisanos*, update the news about the social life of their towns, read the journals like “Chocó 7 días” and “Mira.” They hold posters of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Bob Marley, basketball players like Michael Jordan, Shaquille O’neil, woman and men international models.

After two hours and half in a bus going up the hills of Ciudad Bolívar, the biggest periphery district in the city, I and Enrique my research assistant had a spectacular view over downtown Bogotá. We were closed to El Oasis, the place where most of Afro-Colombian displaced people from the Chocó Province had resettled. Approximately 40,000 people resided in this area. Shantytowns were built on steep hills connected through small paths that go up and down. Altos de Cazucá belongs to southern municipality of the capital: Soacha. Carmen, a young woman from Salaquí, Chocó fled the Génesis military operation in 1997. Her husband was a functionary of AFRODES who was able to purchase a house in Altos de Cazuca. Carmen’s house was the very last before a high pick of the hill. It was built in bricks and concrete. It did not have appliances and it had not been painted yet. But Carmen’s household owned this house and this is a privilege among Afro-colombian displaced people. Carmen told me that they had given them the permit to build their own house for their Afro-Colombian meetings and councils. Tomás was able to get USAID funds from the office of AFRODES in Washington to build the “House of Rights” (Casa de Derechos) for the neighborhood. Carmen’s house had its kitchen located in front and in one side of her house with all the pots hanging like the spatial distribution I found in the houses of the Atrato River. In the back of her house, I could see the mosquitoes’ nets with which everybody in the Chocó province used to cover their beds. Carmen told us to sit and to drink something before we went to know her disco place. Her sons were the disco DJs and they left very early to

select the music for tonight. Carmen told me that her house gets either very cold or very hot. I went with Cecilia, a friend of Carmen and also an AFRODES member, to run errands in the neighborhood. I was surprised when I saw that Analicia's mother, a woman I knew during one of the workshops I organized, was running the shop. We bought green plantains, Chocolate, milk and bread. Carmen prepared us a traditional meal made of Chocoan fried cheese, fried plantain and the classic Bogotanian beverage: hot Chocolate. The disco that Carmen ran was 10 blocks away from her house. There we found her sons within their DJ cabin playing reggaeton music. The disco was a very small place with two palm trees and sea waves drawn in their walls. We chat, laughed and drank some beers. It was already dark when we realized we had to go back very fast because today there was no public transportation after 6pm. It was the holiday of the Virgen del Carmen the lady of the drivers. As we were walking Carmen was telling us that the area we were passing through was very dangerous. A young boy was shot by alleged paramilitary militias last week in one of the streets.

Cecilia lived in a neighborhood called Rincón del Valle (Corner of the Valley) in the Southern part of Bogotá. Most of the houses were made of brick recovered by a layer of concrete that was eventually painted. That Saturday all the stores were opened invading the streets and showing a lively neighborhood. The houses where people lived were also their source of income. They sublet some rooms of the house. Instead of garages, people set up butcheries, mechanical shops, liquor stores, video stores, cell phone stores and any other business that generated revenues, in the first floor of their houses. The stairs of some buildings were used to hand people's clothes. Cecilia was waiting for us at the bus station with two of her sons and two nieces with colorful beads hanging off their braids. She greeted

us with a wide smile and gracious eyes carefully delineated with makeup. As we walked up the hill paved streets, finished houses and plots of grass were left behind. Now the houses we saw were made of wood pillars, boards, tin, and zinc roofs. To get to the entrance of her house they had made steps out of the clay of the mountain cliff, eroded by the rain. The main door was above the floor level just like the way wood houses are built in the Province of Chocó. We had to reach it climbing a long board. Cecilia's house was the only one with windows, built in concrete and with two floors. On the first floor and on one side, they have the kitchen with a window and its walls covered with a yellow plastic where they hang the pots; the bathroom and the laundry small room where you can see the walls in brick. On the second floor they had a living room with a closed exterior door, a dining room, and two bedrooms. In the living room there were two big fridges and next to them, two tall black speakers.

Cecilia was 28 years old and came from Vigía del Fuerte north of the Province of Chocó. She had to leave her town three years ago. She arrived with her husband, an asylum seeker before the American embassy and now director AFRODES' office in Washington. Cecilia lived in Bogotá with her three children her mother and sisters in law and their children. With the support of AFRODES she had set up a sport clothing shop in the neighborhood of Quiroga also in the south of the city. Tomás owned the house where she was living and had sent remittances to finish the rooms for his family and in-laws.

Cecilia's mom had come all the way from Quibdó to see her daughter one last time before she left to the US. In fact Cecilia's mother thought the American Embassy was going to give a visa to her daughter. But Cecilia showed me a letter from the American Embassy stating that they have given the visa only to her children. They have denied her visa because

she had not fully proven she was legally married to Tomás. Most of Afro-Colombian people as well as a most of Colombians never marry formally. Cecilia was concerned but she told me that Tomás was figuring out the way to ask for a family reunification that will allow her and her children to go to the US. She was confident that her husband would succeed in this attempt to take it out of Colombia so she was planning to sell half of the clothing shop she owned with her business partner.

They all complained about the intense cold that they felt in Bogotá and the boredom it had on their moods. One of her sisters in law, a very tall and slim woman with an impressive hairdo with fake curled extensions, appeared with a big tray and a hot *sancocho de gallina criolla*, the meal Cecilia had chosen to offer me and my research assistant. She told us how much she missed her husband and how lonely she felt since his departure. According to her, men did not suffer as much as women because wherever they were there will be always a woman who kept them company. To describe the relationship she had with Tomás she said “love from afar means happy the four of us” meaning love from afar was very difficult to maintain. After lunch, Daysi, the youngest of her sisters in law who was twenty years old brought the portable CD player from her bedroom and proposed to teach us to dance. She led a teen dancing group in La Isla, Ciudad Bolívar. Recently they were invited to do a presentation in Switzerland. She showed us how to dance *champeta* and *bullerengue*. Daisy was insisting that the first rule to dance well was not to be ashamed. She told us that the white girls got shy when they cannot imitate the movements of hips and waists of their Afro-Colombian friends.

It was time for Daysi to go to Ciudad Bolívar to meet with her students in the dancing group she led. As soon as we went out, we noticed how men stared at them whispering

compliments with sexual connotation. Daysi replied: “- Aren’t they going to stop calling her things on the streets?” For her, this was a kind of discrimination because Bogotanian men imposed of her a sexual label she did not have to bear. To take the bus they recognized the bus driver and greeted him. The girl jumped into the bus without paying. Cecilia explained to us that the drivers knew them and did not let them pay the bus tickets. They said that they did not know very well why they got this special treatment. But of course they knew how to use their beauty to get free rides. She seemed to get along well with her neighbors although she said that she kept the distance with them. Her family was the only one from Afro-Colombian descent in this neighborhood. I asked Cecilia if Bogotá ended after this neighborhood and she replied that her neighborhood is not part of Bogotá. “After this neighborhood there are only inhabited mountains,” she said.

Carmen and Cecilia represent the cases of two privileged women within the organization of internally displaced AFRODES. Their husbands are prominent figures in the movement and this has made their lives easier in Bogotá, enabling them to own and improve their houses. Carmen decides to run a disco, tapping on the party and musical personality imputed to her community in the peripheries of Bogotá, and her place has acquired a good name in the area. Cecilia sets up a clothing shop, as an AFRODES affiliate but she sells very little becoming an additional economic burden. Carmen lives in a neighborhood where most of the people from the area of Riosucio and Salaquí have relocated and where they can organize social events and celebrations as before. In contrast, Cecilia lives relatively isolated and she feels lonely and depressed because her husband lives overseas and they have not been able to solve the visa paperwork obstacles for her to leave the country.

Unlike indigenous groups, the vignettes I have just presented above show how Afro-Colombian internally-displaced groups, like most of the migrants who arrive into the city, resettle using the support of their kin and residents trying to build their houses next to each other in the peripheries of Bogotá. Their power resides in their appeal to their ethnic distinctiveness and their affiliation to ethnic organizations. They dominate economic enclaves and they get some advantages by performing the exotic and tropical behaviors and styles that other city residents expect from them.

## **Conclusion**

Reconstruction consists of starting over a new story in people's lives marked by aspirations and frustrations, dystopia and utopia in an urban context. It is a highly-valued and hardly-accessible fantasy of a better life or a better education for their children combined with a sense of turbulence and radical contingency of a very hard present situation. In this chapter I demonstrate how recently arrived internally displaced people get support within the informal web of networks that former migrants have established and have linked the municipalities, provinces and the city. Internally displaced populations find jobs in an apparently marginal informal entrepreneurial sector that is in fact connected to a wider formal sector. In a similar way, populations of internally displaced people that in the past were community leaders reorganize and follow the routes of old mechanisms of associations and cooperatives to materialize their expectations of advancement and dreams of urban housing.

The city constitutes a fertile ground for the reactivation of an intense exchange of cultural practices that have traveled and adopted new forms constantly. Internally- displaced



people find in the city new social and political spheres that welcome migrants, offering new networks interested in ecological, healing, human rights and ethnic issues. The city is even the site for the invention of alternative spiritual and body practices validated with the mark of authenticity that soon enter the circuits of urban consumption. Exotic performances and native therapeutical practices become important sites of expertise that find eager urban adepts and consumers looking for millennial practices of neo-shamanism or messianic spiritual quests of salvation and alternative means to cope with the ailments produced by globalization.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Conjuring the Usurpation of Land's Wealth**

The last two Colombian administrations have presented forced displacement as part of Colombia's chronic poverty taking place in supposed "far away places of conflict" dominated by "terrorist" subversive groups. But besides being the exclusive strategy of subversive groups, forced migration has also become a technology of power implicating the Colombian state, the use of paramilitary armed groups, and global capital's involvement. In the last ten years Colombia has experienced a demographic redistribution of labor force and the introduction of new forms of exploitation in key-strategic regions. Competing modes of power in Colombia have been fighting in Colombia for the spatial ordering of young labor force and the new global treasures of its territories.

Colombian socio-racial order and its historical elaboration of marginality through feudal land-tenure systems and regional politics have exposed ethnic and rural communities to expropriation, excesses, and abuses in the name of national improvement. Disdain and phobia towards indigenous, Afro-Colombian and rural "origins" have been gradually permeated by new discourses in which respect for cultural diversity appear to be the new standard of progressive liberal democracies in the new millenium. Through fieldwork, I discovered that displaced communities were descendants of former evicted homesteading colonists and labor tenants that moved throughout the country in inter-departmental and inter-municipal movements working as agricultural workers or running after the coffee, timber, and coca booms.

Through their narratives, my interviewees were inscribing an alternative history of rebellious agrarian movements seeking to overthrow patron-client relationships of dependency and exploitation within large-scale agro-industries. In a country with one of the most unequal land distribution in the world, land and agrarian reform became the *campesino*, indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements' obsession. After the 1991 cultural rights and ethnicity became new strong modes of cohesiveness and resistance. For the first time in Colombian recent history, social movements, particularly ethnic organizations, have formed a coalition to denounce internationally forced displacement as a violation against culture, place, and nature. Colombian ethnic movements have deployed essentializing assertions that link place and culture while mobilizing translocal and transnational networks. Forced displacement has been the opportunity for social movements to rupture the silences around centuries of social injustice.

I have presented how by means of intimidation and removal, communities that previously lived at the margins of the Colombian state have been removed to the peripheries of urban areas of the country where they are perceived by institutions as well as state programs as populations tied to primordial places of belonging. I also show how the explosive coexistence of a neo-liberal accumulation of capital and a prevailing rule of violence has infused additional feelings of vulnerability among these marginal populations. The resulting contradictions of that coexistence have produced a total disarticulation between war's survivors and untouched privileged sectors that had given their consent for war and support a hard-line type of government.

In Colombia's convoluted recent history war had been one of the few options of work for thousands of poor young Colombian rural populations. Internally-displaced communities'

claims for justice before such a discouraging future are rarely addressed as one of the most painful aspect of their process of displacement. Yet, my ethnographic material demonstrates that it constitutes a violation against agricultural workers' lives, trajectories and illusions of betterment.

Two powerful commonly accepted discourses have seen displacement as a psychological as well as an economic problem de-historicizing the political dimension and the demand for justice that displaced populations consider of paramount importance. On the one hand, a vast techno-political humanitarian apparatus use representations of helplessness to carry out their missions, inculcate new economic subjectivities (Elyachar 2005), and deliver kits of assistance. Donor agencies and aid organizations use compassion in their seeking for funds to alleviate a tragedy depicted as tied to cruel living conditions of places prone to 'natural' violence and 'endemic poverty. Medical and psychosocial discourses too often legitimate this view of displacement and convey the idea that the trauma of displacement is located in people's minds and bodies. State programs of resettlement, International agencies and organizations promote the idea that displaced populations should heal their wounds, forget the past, become entrepreneurial and acquire new values of more advanced societies in order to resettle successfully.

My fieldwork has shown that internally displaced women from Andean rural background organized around the topics of recovery and reconstruction by avoiding victimization discourses. Instead they worked on their own processes of recovery and autonomy in their own terms. These households expressed feelings of fear, impotence, outrage, and rage before the murders of their relatives and the blatant impunity that surrounded those crimes. A strong claim for compensations and accountability underlies

displaced people's narratives in which they describe how by means of fear they have somatized political terror. Forced displacement and the subsequent eviction were experienced as brutal invasions of their dwellings, well-being and intimacy. Displaced households feel that the total impunity that surrounded their history of displacement has contributed to dismiss their loss of honor, prestige, and reputation. Meager state assistance for the victims of war contrasts with the privileges that paramilitary groups (the main perpetrators of massacres and evictions) have obtained through the Law of "Peace and justice" signed under Uribe's government in 2005.

The second type of commonly used discourse that erases the historical continuity of forced displacement as an old and new technique of violence is related to the way place and people have been represented according to historically constructed stereotypes. On the one hand, displacement is easily conceptualized as the disconnection from primordial social environments or culture-beds, commonly conceived as unique sources of people's identities. Place-making and identity are usually discussed as possessions or attributes internally displaced lose by means of displacement. On the other hand, internally- displaced people are automatically framed within the stereotypes derived from the historical representations of the places they come from. There is a strong hierarchical classification of people and places associated to the dualism urban/rural according to which internally displaced are assumed to come from rural, isolated and tribal places as opposed to the cities thought as developed places that enjoy civilized life-styles.

Through a moral representation of the time and land they occupied before the events of eviction, non-indigenous displaced agricultural workers build an alternative discourse to claim social recognition as they find themselves deprived from it. The affective and sensorial

dimensions of places memories acquire an important commemorative symbolism.

Interviewees revisited important aspects of their past and highlighted their engagements with community and family tasks. Material world and nature that surround their lives before displacement were imbued with an intense personal experience and sentimental value. These memory-places constituted their most cherished inalienable possessions (Weiner 1992) and the means to demonstrate their former standing. Through the evocation of their feeling of home, the happy times that would never come back, the food they had in abundance, their autonomy acquired through the acquisition of lands and their contributions to their town's life improvements, people made sense of this sudden turning point in their lives. They also used this alternative temporality to counter the various logics of discrimination that labeled them as poor and property-less. Through a radical division between a "before" of plenty and freedom and an "after" of scarcity and hardship, people convey in personal and nostalgic terms how this past represented an intensely lived landscape.

In the 1990s the Colombian state opened its economy to foreign investment and adjustment policies and in the meantime inherited the multicultural spirit inaugurated by the 1991 Constitution. The intensification of the war proved to be the battle over the new "hotspots" of biodiversity that ethnic minorities were claiming as part of their indivisible territories. Newly strengthened indigenous movements organized around a common front against the future concessions that the Colombian state have made and would certainly keep making with multinational interests to exploit the natural reserves of these lands. Their resistance consisted on proving not only that they were the natural ecological guardians of nature but also that they inhabited these lands since "the beginning of all times." "Nature" was presented as source of ancestral spiritual wisdom and history and "territory," the

domains in which cultural integrity was sustained and nurtured (Sawyer 2004:48). By affirming that the greedy western mind went mad with the new economic model, indigenous movements claimed their duty to take care of Planet Earth.

Similarly, Afro-Colombian populations undertook a very serious and arduous political project through which they demonstrated and realized that they were the ones who decided the terms of their own destinies. For centuries, they had been culturally good preservers of the Pacific Colombian rain forests. They openly disagreed with the hegemonic model of development that had been currently destroying their polyphonic modes of production, their botanic and medical “secrets,” and their harmonious relations with natural and social beings. By stating the rights over a wide cosmology entailing spirituality, integrity, balance and traditional forms of governing, Colombian ethnic groups had defended place-making practices threatened by war.

Finally, in this dissertation I demonstrate that forced displacement has also triggered a process of unprecedented change in the peripheries of Bogotá. Not only have displaced people opened new informal services but they have also visibilized and dynamized neighborhood political organizations in their obtention of services and infrastructure. As dynamic agents of entrepreneurship that find their way independently from the Colombian state, some displaced populations are unintentionally contributing to strengthen the expansion of the market and the dismantling of the welfare state in Colombia.

During internally displaced people’s process of re-territorialization, they have created unexpected and surprising zones of cultural contact in which former and recently arrived migrants, international agencies, national NGOs and grass-root associations converge in a multiplicity of discourses addressing issues of psicosocial recovery, environmentalism,

multiculturalism, gender, and ethnicity. For the first time in many decades of labor migration, the new displaced populations use their multiple cultural repertoires, create alternative practices, and oppose prevailing conformity of elites with neo-liberal principles. Urban groups have adhered forced migrants' discourse of authenticity, ancestral knowledge, neo-shamanism, and opposition to war. Clean food, healing process of the body and the soul, ecological thinking tied to spirituality, and display of afro aesthetics and life-styles are some of these new urban practices and quests for meaning presented as part of the riddle to solve the current ailments of globalization.



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## PERIODICALS

*El Espectador*, March 2005:1B

*El Tiempo*

“Plan Patriota. A corazón abierto,” May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 1-6 – 1-11

“Presidente Uribe ya tiene un nuevo proyecto de ‘ley de paras,’” February 23, 2005:1-2

“Tres años de toma y nada” November 6, 2002: 1-6

“Fin a toma de tres años en Zona Rosa,” December 22, 2002:1-18

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## WEBSITES

<http://www.amnesty.org>: Amnesty International reports’ web page

<http://www.cocomacia.org.co/>: COCOMACIA web page

<http://www.codhes.org> : CODHES website

<http://www.disaster-info.net/desplazados> RSS statistics and maps on forced displacement in Colombia

<http://www.etniasdecolombia.org> : Fundación Hemera web site

<http://www.forointerretnicochoco.org> : Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó web page

<http://www.mnacimarron.org>: Movimiento nacional por los derechos humanos de las comunidades afrocolombianas web site

<http://www.renacientes.org>: PCN web site

<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng>: Website for the International Committee of the Red Cross

<http://ochaonline.un.org>: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) web page

<http://www.onic.org.co> : ONIC web page

<http://www.red.gov.co> : RSS (Social Solidarity Network) web page

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?Open> ReliefWeb administered by OCHA.

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home> : UNHCR web page

<http://www.ctconfucc.org/partnertships/colombia/colmbiatrip3.html>  
visited on april 8, 2005

## GLOSSARY

<i>ayahuasca</i>	Plant from the forests of the Amazon prepared as an infusion for shamanic, medicinal, and religious purposes
<i>bastimento</i>	provision of plantain, corn and brown sugar used as an everyday Kankuamo dish
<i>bocachico</i>	Fish from the rivers of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
<i>bollo limpio</i>	Dried corn
<i>bullerengue</i>	Caribbean traditional musical rhythm
<i>cabildos</i>	Elected indigenous council administering the <i>resguardo</i>
<i>cachacos</i>	Name given to the people from Bogotá
<i>campesinos</i>	Refers to <i>mestizo</i> colonos or non-indigenous agricultural workers
<i>cápax</i>	Fish from the Pacific Coast
<i>chagra</i>	Orchard or small agricultural unit for daily sustenance
<i>chagropanga</i>	One of the hallucinogenic plants used for the yagé ritual
<i>champeta</i>	One type of Afro-Colombian urban music
<i>chicha</i>	Andean traditional beverage made of fermented maize
<i>chirrinchi</i>	Wayuu and Kankuamo home-made liqueur
<i>chontaduros</i>	Tropical fruit
<i>churro</i>	Sweet fried pastries made of flour and eggs
<i>cimarrón</i>	Slaves who escaped slavery and resisted creating their own villages
<i>cocaleros</i>	Growers of coca crops who organized in 1996 against the Colombian anti-drug government policies
<i>colaboradores</i>	Non-indigenous activists
<i>colono</i>	Refers to rural migrants who have resettled in state lands and make them productive
<i>Compañero</i>	Comrade, partner. Used to refer to a friend or a work/task partner
<i>Consejo comunitario</i>	Community Councils created by Law 70 of 1994 represent black communities in their collective process of land titling
<i>costeños</i>	<i>Mestizo</i> people from the Caribbean Coast
<i>Creencias</i>	Name used by Afro-Colombians to refer to traditions and beliefs
<i>Cuentas</i>	Small colored stones used as ritual offerings by indigenous groups of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. They represent the places inhabited by their ancestors
<i>cunche</i>	Plantain
<i>cuy</i>	South American small rodent that forms part of the Inga indigenous group's diet
<i>derecho mayor</i>	The primordial sovereignty of indigenous authorities by virtue of their being the first Americans



<i>descuaje</i>	According to folk classification of diseases it is the dislocation of internal organs that the <i>sobandero</i> relocate in their proper place
<i>Empresa comunitaria</i>	peasant organizations created since 1961 during the Agrarian Reform in Colombia. These associations had collective ownership and exploitation over <i>tierras baldías</i>
<i>familias guardabosques</i>	Alvaro Uribe administration's alternative development program through which agricultural households sign a contract with the government to clean their lands from illegal crops
<i>Frente Nacional</i>	Agreement signed between the two main Colombian parties (liberal and conservative parties) to alternate their power from 1958 until 1974 and pacify the country during the period known as La Violencia
<i>gamonal</i>	Despotic patron who exerts rural local power
<i>guanábana</i>	Tropical fruit tree
<i>guardia indígena</i>	Non-armed indigenous groups from the Cauca Province in charge of defending their communities, territories, and rights from armed groups. They have led resistance and rescuing actions
<i>guasca</i>	Herb used to season traditional soups
<i>guisado de bocachico</i>	Seasoning for the fish
<i>hacienda</i>	Land-tenure system of agrarian exploitation based on peonage
<i>hayo</i>	Herb mixed with lime that indigenous from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta chew to get strength
<i>inquilinato</i>	Rooms in a building or a house of the periphery of Bogotá with various floors that have been subdivided for the purpose of renting.
<i>interior</i>	Name given to the Andean region surrounding Bogotá
<i>Junta de Acción Comunal</i>	Community associations created in 1958 have been the main local people's form of civic participation in rural municipalities and urban neighborhoods
<i>La Violencia</i>	Period of bipartisan political violence (1948, 1950s, 1960s) during which 200,000 people were murdered
<i>ley se</i>	Law of origin that protects life and balance of the earth
<i>lo propio</i>	Expression that means to get what is one's own
<i>makeka</i>	White cotton dress
<i>maloka:</i>	Large multifamily long house of certain indigenous groups from the Amazon
<i>Mama</i>	Spiritual leaders from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
<i>mestizo</i>	non indigenous and non-Afro-Colombian
<i>minga</i>	Collective community service practiced by Andean indigenous and peasant communities to support harvest activities as well as the construction of people's homes.
<i>mondongo</i>	Cow's stomach meat prepared in a soup
<i>monte</i>	mountain, forest
<i>paisano</i>	Of the same town of region

<i>palenques:</i>	Distant settlements created by slaves who fled slavery
<i>parcelación</i>	Subdivision of <i>resguardos</i>
<i>poporo:</i>	Wooden recipient with a little stick that Kankuamo indigenous people always carry to think while chewing coca leaves, lime and <i>hayo</i>
<i>rebusque</i>	Informal economy activities and resourceful ways to find a source of income
<i>reservas campesinas</i>	Created by Law 160, 1994 but implemented until 1996 under the pressure of peasant movements they constitute limited plots of <i>tierras baldías</i> adjudicated to agricultural workers
<i>resguardo</i>	Indigenous territorial unit comprising communal and inalienable lands administered by elected councils and legitimized by colonial title
<i>solidarios</i>	Non indigenous activists
<i>terauricas</i>	Kankuamo ceremonial houses
<i>tierras baldías</i>	Tracts of land granted to homesteaders by the Colombian government during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; also called public lands.
<i>tomas de yagé</i>	Healing Inga indigenous ritual through the drinking of yagé
<i>totumo</i>	Wood from a tree. Many recipients are made of <i>totumo</i>
<i>tumbadores de selva</i>	Forest cutters
<i>tutelas</i>	Juridical action that any Colombian citizen can undertake before a judge when his/her constitutional rights have been denied or threatened
<i>uhaira sacha</i>	leaves from the tree of the wind
<i>viuda de pescado</i>	Kankuamo dish made of yuca and fish
<i>yagé</i>	see ayahuasca

## ACRONYMS

ACABA: Asociación Campesina del Baudó, Peasant Association of Baudó  
ACAMURI: Asociación Campesina del Municipio de Riosucio, Peasant Association of the Municipality of Riosucio  
ACIA: Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato, Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato River.  
ADVICORA: Asociación departamental de la población desplazada por la violencia en Colombia en el Atlántico, Departmental Association of Violence-induced Displaced People  
AFRODES: Organización Afro-Colombiana de Desplazados, Afro-Colombian Organization of Displaced People  
ANMUCIC: Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas e Indígenas de Colombia, National Association of Peasant and Indigenous Colombian Women  
ANUC: Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, National Association of Peasant Users  
ANUC- UR: Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos Unidad y Reconstrucción, National Association of Peasant Users-Unity and Reconstruction  
ASHOKA: Global Association of World's Leading Social Entrepreneurs.  
ASINTEFACAH: Asociación Nacional de Familias Cabezas de Hogar Amanecer Social Colombiano, National Association of Single Women's Households Colombian Social Sunrise  
ATCC: Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Carare, Association of Peasants and workers from Carare  
AUC: Auto Defensas Unidas de Colombia, Unified Self-Defense Groups of Colombia  
BANCOLDEX: Banco de comercio exterior de Colombia S. A. Foreign Colombian Trade Bank  
CAVIDA: Comunidades de Autodeterminación, Vida y Dignidad del Cacarica, Self-determination, life and dignity Communities from Cacarica.  
CEDAVIDA: Fundación Social Colombiana, Colombian Social foundation.  
CINEP: Centro para la Educación e Investigación Popular, Center for Social Research and Education.  
COCOMACIA: Consejo Comunitario de la Asociación de Campesinos Integrales del Atrato, Community Council of the Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato River  
CODHES: Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, Consulting Center on Human Rights and Displacement  
CONPES: Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social, National Council of Social and Economic Policy.  
CNC: Consejo Nacional Campesino, Peasant National Council  
CORABASTOS: Corporación de abastos de Bogotá S. A. Bogota Food Distribution Corporation  
CORFERIAS  
CORPONARIÑO: Corporación Autónoma de Desarrollo regional, Regional Autonomous Development Corporation.  
CRIC: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, Indigenous Regional Council

DANE: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, National Administrative Department of Statistics.

DRI: Desarrollo Rural Integrado, Rural Development program

ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional, The National Liberation Army

EPL: Ejército Popular de Liberación, Popular Army of Liberation

FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-Popular

FECODE: Federación Colombiana de Educadores, Colombian Teachers' Federation

FENSUAGRO Federación Nacional Agropecuaria de Colombia, National Agricultural Federation

FINAGRO: Fondo para el financiamiento del sector agropecuario, Fund for agricultural activities

FISCH: Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó, Interethnic forum Solidarity Chocó

FONADE: Fondo Nacional del Ahorro

FTA: Tratado de Libre Comercio entre EE. UU., Colombia, Ecuador y Perú, Free Trade Agreement between the US government and Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

GAULA: Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal

HEMERA: Fundación Etnias de Colombia, Organization Ethnic Colombian groups

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IMO: Internacional Migration organization

INCORA: Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria, Institute of the Colombian Agrarian Reform

M-19: Movimiento 19 de abril, April 19 Movement

OCABA: Organización Campesina del Bajo Atrato, Peasant Organization of the Lower Atrato River

OFF: Organización Femenina Popular Women people's organization

ONIC: Organización Nacional Indígena, National Indigenous Organization

OPIAC: Organización de Personas Indígenas del Amazonas Colombiano, Organization of Amazonian Indigenous People

PCN: Proceso de Comunidades Negras, Black Community Process

REDIF: Red de investigadores en desplazamiento forzado en Colombia, Network of Researchers on forced displacement in Colombia.

RSS: Red de Solidaridad Social, Social Solidarity Network

SENA: Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, National Learning Service

SISDES: Sistema de Información sobre Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento Forzado, Information System on Human Rights and Displacement in Colombia.

SUR: Sistema Único de Registro, Unified Registration System of the Social Solidarity Network.

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees

UP: Unión Patriótica, Patriotic Union Party

UNICOSTA: Community Council of the municipality of Iscuandé in the Province of Nariño

USAID: United States Agency for International Development