

**Ripped from the Land, Shipped Away and Reborn:  
Unthinking the Conceptual and Socio-Geo-  
Historical Dimensions of the Massacre of Bellavista**

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**RIPPED FROM THE LAND, SHIPPED AWAY, AND REBORN**  
**UNTHINKING THE CONCEPTUAL AND SOCIO-GEO-HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS**  
**OF THE MASSACRE OF BELLAVISTA**

A Thesis Presented

by

AURORA VERGARA-FIGUEROA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of  
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Sociology



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Sociology

To my loving mother Maria Teresa Figueroa

To the Women of Bellavista

*Afrocolombian Women Warriors*

For their strength, courage, love and wisdom

## **ABSTRACT**

### **RIPPED FROM THE LAND, SHIPPED AWAY, AND REBORN UNTHINKING THE CONCEPTUAL AND SOCIO-GEO-HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE MASSACRE OF BELLAVISTA**

**FEBRUARY 2011**

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The monograph *Ripped from the land, shipped away, and reborn* introduces the concept *Destierro*-which translates as uprooting, deracination, exile, exodus, and banishment- to unthink the intellectual, political, and legal categories used by prevailing intellectual models to narrate/explain the 2002 massacre, occurred at the community of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó-Colombia. This thesis offers a critical prospect of the event. It highlights ethno-historical analytics to deconstruct the concepts of forced displacement, and forced migration. I study the racial, class, gender, generational, and regional dimensions undergirding this phenomenon to propose an Afrodiasporic Decolonial Critique of the field of Forced Migration. Single-axis explanations of this event and phenomenon have failed to move forward a complex analytical framework to fully explain the joint effect of multiple systems of oppression at play in events of land dispossession. Variables such as race, place, gender, and class; historical processes such as

colonialism, the development of capitalism, contemporary place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization, and neoliberal multiculturalism intersect in this massacre.

Accordingly, it is an imperative for critical historical sociological research to craft theories, and concepts to understand these crossroads. The basic argument I develop is that the concepts of forced displacement, and forced migration are formulas for historical erasure, and therefore limited to contribute to the demands for reparation of the affected populations. Territories are socio-geo-historical formations that can only be understood within the context in which they are conceived, produced, re-produced, and unproduced. Likewise, the categories used to name and study land dispossession need to be contextually and historically grounded to capture both complex local specificities, and global linkages. I advocate for concepts that can be used as categories of analysis, social mobilization, and reparation; to unveil the historical roots of the current constellation of processes, which are generating a new cycle of Diaspora of the Afrocolombian, and Indigenous populations, and similar contexts in the world-system in which this phenomenon is observable. In this vein, unthinking/deconstructing the concepts of forced displacement, and forced migration, as well as the massacre of Bellavista as an event of forced displacement, is an attempt to write stories that can repair the broken dignity of those that have been, and still are continually exploited.

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**Figure 1: Navigating the Atrato River, Quibdó-Chocó**



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<sup>1</sup> Photo: Foto Choco 7 Días Edición No. 758, Quibdó, Mayo 14 al 20 de 2010

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an extended case-based study of a massacre. In the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May of 2002 119 people were massacred in the communitarian church of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó- Colombia<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 1.744 families had to abandon the territory to escape the atrocity of this event. After May 2, 2010 the people who made it alive and left the community entered into the category of IDPs (Internally Displaced Peoples) The president and the leaders of the army blamed in the media the “illegal” armed forces, principally the guerrilla for the deaths, and avoided taking any responsibility on what had happened. Nonetheless, a report emitted by the Administrative Court of Quibdó-Chocó after six years of the massacre, declared the nation as ‘administratively’ responsible.<sup>3</sup> Like the population of Bellavista 27.1 million people in 54 countries have lost their territories, and are also considered as ‘displaced’<sup>4</sup>. Among the six largest ‘internally displaced populations’ are Sudan, Colombia, Iraq, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Pakistan<sup>5</sup>. The massacre of Bellavista is a case of a paradigmatic significance to comprehend contemporary patterns of violence in Colombia, current practices of land dispossession, and a new cycle of Diasporization of the Afrodescendent population. The event raised challenging questions about the nature of what the politicians of the time called ‘acts of terrorism’, the abandonment of

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex Map No. 2 Map of the Community of Bellavista; A recently published report states that the recount of the remaining parts of the bodies showed that the numbers of deaths was less than what has been said up today, they believe it was 79 deaths <http://www.elspectador.com/impreso/nacional/articuloimpreso-225035-bojaya-guerra-sin-limites> (Consulted Sep, 18, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> La Nación reponsable de la masacre de Bojayá (The Nation responsible for the massacre of Bojayá) <http://www.semana.com/noticias-on-line/nacion-responsable-masacre-bojaya/112237.aspx> (Consulted, May, 30th, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> See worldwide map of forced displacement. Chapter 1

<sup>5</sup> IDMC(The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre)-NRC. *Internal Displacement. Global Overview of trends and developments in 2009*. IDMC-NRC. <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

the state, the corruption in the state of Chocó, about racism, marginalization, and the question of Destierro<sup>6</sup>. During the 7<sup>th</sup> commemoration of this horrifying event in 2009 the major questions to explain what happened, and the procedure to repair the inhabitants affected still remained unsolved.

### **Epistemological Silencing, historical-emptied-spaces and the routinization of erasure**

In the state of Chocó 82.7% of the population (454,030 inhabitants) self identified as afrodescendent in the census of 2005. This state is also known as the “Africa of Colombia”. This statement implies the poverty, and marginality of the region. In 2008 this state was politically declared unviable due to the internal corruption and its supposed vial isolation. One may argue that the statements made to explain the declared crisis condense most of the generalized representations of Chocó, which are historical formations of a marginal/isolated/ignorant otherness within the modern/ colonial capitalist world-system. These representations and wide spread beliefs erase a long history of colonization and oppression that have taken place in this territory. Then, it should not be a major surprise that a significant percentage of the “displaced” population comes from this region, and that the major massacre of the beginning of the XXI century occurred there: *the massacre of Bellavista*.

Indeed, this department has been represented as a space of darkness where it is impossible to live, and as a space of extreme poverty and ignorance, which is unable to administrate its own resources. On the other hand, this department has been seen as potential for territorial

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<sup>6</sup> I am preserving the Spanish concept used to name a set of economic, social, political, cultural and ideological process, which involves the violent dispersing of the inhabitants of a territory. It undertakes the effacement of the population and the appropriation of their lands. Many of those stolen territories are owned collectively, those have been worked, fought and politicized (i.e. Colombia) It implicates a break / fracture of the benchmarks with the territory, the community and the landscape. It translates uprooting, deracination, forced displacement, exile, exodus, and banishment ( the Colombian conceptual debate around the notion, and the significance of differentiate will be addressed in Chapter1 of this thesis)

expansion, as an area open for exploration, and continuing colonialization. Accordingly, these colonial, geopolitical, economic, ideological, and historical representations are used as common place to explain the variety of problems of the state. As a consequence the impact of what is called forced displacement has been tried to be mitigated but not radically eradicated. The legal ownership of the land of those forced to abandon their territories practically is abolished when an episode of the magnitude of the massacre of Bellavista occurs, and the history producing the spaces where this problem is taking place is undermined by the epistemological construction of the phenomenon.

Consequently this monograph addresses the question of how the context of place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization and violence in the territories of the state of Chocó enlighten alternative ways to comprehend experiences of ‘forced displacement/migration’, and new cycles of Diaspora of afrodescendent populations. This thesis seeks to disentangle the conceptual, socio-historical and geographical dimensions of Destierro based on an ethnography post-massacre at the community of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó-Colombia. This monograph sets its foundation on one working hypothesis: the limitation of the concepts of forced displacement/migration to reveal the constellation of historical process, which lie behind acts of land dispossession. The usefulness of these concepts as analytical categories of liberation/transformation is limited due to their lack of historicity, and to their ability to reinforce racialization, marginalization, and domination.

Building on the proposed case, this thesis considers that the ideas of marginality and isolation attached to the history of the department of Chocó are foundational to legitimate the stealing of the territories of Indigenous and Afrodescendent communities.

I use the notion of *historical-emptied-spaces* and *the routinization of erasure* as working concepts to explore fundamental questions such as how the epistemic, geopolitical and historical production of the state of Chocó as a marginal territory lies behind the contemporary deracination of the Chocoan population. Hence, this monograph outlines critically some of the sources of production of the ideas of isolation and marginality that have justified the Destierro of the population in the Atrato River in Colombia. It reveals narratives/practices, which have created the basis for the formation of spaces considered as ‘blank’ or ‘empty’, where colonialism (violence/extermination/genocide/ethnic cleansing/Destierro) and the colonality of power-knowledge take place. At the same time it considers the process of mobilization clamming autonomy, self-determination, justice and reparation as struggles for liberation and decolonization confronting this new cycle of diasporization.

This year the Afrocolombian community celebrates 159 years of the abolition of slavery in Colombia, and 17 years of the Ley 70/ 93 or Ley the comunidades negras (Law 70 of 1993 or Law of black communities). This piece of law legalizes the right that afrocolombian communities have to own the land they have worked since the colonial period, in which they fought to gain their freedom and have lived freely for the last two hundred years proximately. Several articles and books have been published to recognize the political gains that this law represents or to criticize its limitations, as well as to describe the role that it has in the current acts of violence and processes of Destierro that these communities are living.

It means that, in addition to the killings, kidnappings, and disappearance, the afrodescendent communities of the Colombian Pacific are been victims of a violent process of land appropriation, in which they have all the chances to loss the debate of who owns the land that is been disputed.



In 2009 five cases (at least) had called the attention of the afrodescendent movements: The Cerro Careperro, Suarez, Jiguamiandó, Curvaradó, Belén de Bajirá, and Bellavista. After centuries of portraying the state of Chocó as dark, isolated, extremely difficult to ‘penetrate’, mysterious, and marginal etc. from different countries several agents of the current Colombian government, foreign oil companies, NGOs, among others are claiming the land where these communities are located as theirs. Those agents have arrived to these communities with the ‘proper’ documentation, and the highly legitimized developmentalist narrative to claim these lands. Studying the case of Bellavista will surely place the debate on the importance of questing how people fight back this ongoing colonization and defend for their property and autonomy, even in the cases in which they do not have “the ‘proper’ documentation” but have lived and worked there for generations.

Therefore, describing, or at least outlining the histories behind the representations of the state of Chocó imply an epistemic decolonial turn<sup>7</sup> to disentangle colonial continuities of domination, such as Destierro, which it faces today. Accordingly, this thesis aims to develop an alternative epistemology to comprehend how this department came to be what it is today, how this history informs its contemporary struggles and how its population continues building up futures of dignity. Comprehending this question requires us to identify what we know about this phenomenon, what the state-of-the-art is, what is the capacity of the established concepts to comprehend it, how the territories affected came to be, how people started

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<sup>7</sup> See Quijano, Aníbal. 2000. «Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social». *Journal of World-Systems Research* XI, no. 2:342-86. Accesible en <http://jwsr.ucr.edu>; Quijano, Aníbal. 1997. «Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina». *Anuario Mariateguiano* 9: 113-21, Lao-Montes, Agustin. For an Analytics of the Coloniality of Power. Unpublished manuscript; Maldonado-Torres, Nelson . “Post-continental Philosophy and the Decolonial Turn: Introduction to Conference Mapping the Decolonial Turn: Post/Trans-Continental Interventions in Philosophy, Theory, and Critique,” University of California at Berkeley

claiming and acquitting the land stolen in the case of the Chocó, and making it into their territories are major questions that need to be explored.

In consequence, I have collected, catalogued, and substantively reviewed the major documents produced to comprehend this phenomenon. By doing so, I start marking the tensions and silences that are preventing the advance of a more complex understanding of this problem and its implication in today's realities<sup>8</sup>. I also formulate general arguments regarding the implications of *epistemological silence* as analytics for an epistemic and ethical-political project of mobilization in the region today. Following this path, this writing explores some fundamental questions in order to develop an afrodiasporic decolonial perspective of Destierro.

I suggest that there is an insightful analytical and political contribution in: a) Revisiting the main agreements around the sociological study of forced displacement in Colombia, and Forced Migration as characterized in a more international context, its emergent trends and conceptual proposals; b) differentiating processes of Destierro from other sociopolitical and analytical categories within the epistemologies and politics of dislocation such as forced displacement, forced migration, exile, exodus, uprooting, banishment, extermination, etc. ; c) considering contemporary processes of Destierro more than as another effect of the armed conflict in Colombia as a continuum in the historical racial and spatial formations of the nation; d) the impact that the of the colonial narratives and representations of the department of Chocó have on today's radiography of its reality, and the lack of historical sense that lie behind

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<sup>8</sup> It implies to question of why in more than a 150 years of scholarly research this field has not been able to produce a complete inventory of the existent sources to write a comprehensive history of the state of Chocó, and the explanations for not been able to fully integrate its history to the history of the Colombian society, in what it pertains to land acquisition and territorial settlement. It is necessary to build up a preliminary set of notes to develop a historiography that compiles the major sources of inquiry on the initiating practices of land acquisition and territory-making in the state of Chocó since its origins. I argue that there is a need to look into the achievements, tensions and possibilities of the written history of the territorial settlement and practices of land acquisition of the state of Chocó because it serves as a keystone for a critical analytics of contemporary processes of Destierro.

the arguments which state that the actual problems of this department constitute another face of its “inherently” marginal, isolated and corrupted “nature.

Accordingly, this combination of the ethnographic report and literature review seeks to develop a problem statement, to formulate a researchable question, and an exploratory research synthesis of the state of the knowledge on this topic, the main results, and the main open questions. Thus, one could be able to socio-geo-historically connect the previous events that explain, illuminate, or just preceded the upsurge of violence and Destierro of the period 1996-2010<sup>9</sup> in the region studied. Hence, this thesis contributes to the literature on this topic going beyond the pattern of describing processes of land dispossession mostly local, not connected to the major historical<sup>10</sup>, political, and economical processes of the region affected, the nation, and the world system.

By doing this, most of the literature produced do not challenge the representations that have contributed to the exclusion the history of the state of Chocó from the main history of the nation, even in the cases that claim to do so, and as a result contribute to the perpetuating of this epistemological and political erasure. This research will contribute to the development of the sociology of violence, the studies of Diaspora in Colombia, through an Afrodiasporic Decolonial perspective of the process of Destierro, which has undergone in the municipality of Bojayá.

A community located in the Atrato River basin in the north of the department of Chocó, describing the factors and actors constituting this phenomenon and the social changes it generates.

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<sup>9</sup> See Table # 1 Summary of key events of Destierro in the region of Bojayá

<sup>10</sup> Predominantly a history of Diaspora, territorial settlement, land acquisition and territory making

This thesis has three chapters. Borrowing from comparative historical sociology, sociology of law, philosophy of history, semiotics, critical geography I examine in Chapter 1 the rationales in which the concepts of Forced Displacement, and Forced Migration are founded, the contributions of their analytics, as well as their shortcomings. With the lenses of the proposed model I study the case of Bellavista to evaluate its effectiveness. In Chapter 2 I have created a collective voice with the 25 interviews I conducted to tell an alternative narrative of the event in a post-massacre context. In this story I link different scenarios and actors that were left in previous accounts of the massacre. In Chapter 3 I explore the questions that the prevailing models leave undertheorized. As a consequence I locate the massacre of 2002 in a larger historical context of four centuries of the local history of Bellavista with timid attempts to link the events occurred in every period major economic and political processes in other regions of the world system. As a result, I highlight the significance of a rigorous geo-historical analysis of Destierro. Such analysis requires us to construct Destierro and Diaspora as categories of *analysis*. This implies understanding that previous to an event of Destierro, of land dispossession there is a long process of land acquisition, and territory making. To think this matter conceptually, I propose I DTD<sup>2</sup> formula (Diaspora, Territorialization-Destierro-Diaspora), which could help us to start bringing all this dimensions into a serious debate. This is what I mean by *unthinking the conceptual and socio-geo- historical dimensions of the massacre of Bellavista*.

My writing carries out the wishes of the communities victims of deracination. My reflections would have not been possible if I would have not undertaken dangerous trips to the regions assaulted by violence, and if I would have not committed to tell their stories as they wanted to deliver it to the world. My commitment to their projects ends when their anguishes do.

## CHAPTER 1

### UNTHINKING FORCED MIGRATION

#### On The Epistemic and Political Value of History, Geography and Complexity in the Study of Afrocolombian Diasporas

*“History is the fruit of power,  
but power is never itself so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous.  
The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility,  
the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots”*

**(Michel- Rolph Trouillot, [Haitian Anthropologist. *Silencing the Past*. 1995])**

*“It is quite normal for scholars and scientists to rethink issues. When important new evidence undermines old theory and predictions do not hold, we are pressed to rethink our premises (...). But in addition to rethinking, which is ‘normal,’ I think we need to ‘unthink’ nineteenth-century social science because many of its presumptions—which in my view are misleading and constrictive—still have far too strong a hold in our mentalities. These presumptions, once considered liberating of the spirit, serve today as the central intellectual barrier to useful analysis of the social world”*  
**(Immanuel Wallerstein, [American Sociologist. *Unthinking the Social Sciences*. 1991])**

## **Introduction**

### **The Problem**

#### **Why unthinking Forced Migration?**

Recent scholarship on Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies reveals the need for a theoretical reflection about what constitutes to be a refugee, a forced migrant, or a forced displaced (Chimni 1998) (Black 2001)(Turton 2003) (Rodgers 2004) (Landau and Jacobsen 2004) (Arboleda 2007) (Marfleet 2007) (Chimni 2009). Critics have argued that there is a practice with a long pedigree of relatively uncritical use of policy-based definitions of refugees (Black 2001:63). Others have argued that forced displacement, and forced migration are euphemisms for more historically complex processes such as *Destierro*, which translates as uprooting, deracination, exile, exodus, and banishment<sup>11</sup> (Arboleda 2007). However, the definition issue has been displaced or not undertaken seriously. The centrality of historical *analysis* to comprehend the phenomena the notion of forced migration intends to explain ‘has always been notable by its absence’ (Marfleet 2007:136). Due to the lack of historicity underneath the concept of forced migration, I argue that this field of social research, intellectual and political intervention needs to be revised, and radically reconsidered on a case by case basis. Critical ethno-historical research should contribute to the emergence of alternative categories, theoretical frameworks, and methodological principles to move beyond the notion of forced

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<sup>11</sup>However, this category means far more than these preliminary notions. For an initial introduction to this concept I am preserving the Spanish category used in Colombia to name a set of economic, social, political, cultural and ideological processes, which involve dispersing the inhabitants of a territory. It undertakes the effacement of the population and the appropriation of their land. It implicates a break/ fracture of the benchmarks with the territory, the community and the landscape. The Colombian conceptual debate around the notion and its significance as a category of analysis, social mobilization, and reparation linked to major socio-historical processes such as the African and Afrocolombian Diasporas will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. By the end of this monograph I expect the reader will be familiarized with the term both in Spanish and English, since laying out the multiple meanings this notion encompasses, and the power it has to decolonialize the field of Forced Migration is what I am aiming for.

migration, which is looking increasingly inadequate (Turton 2003; 14). I would go further to suggest that it is a notion that has proven dubious, narrow-minded, constrictive, and dangerous.

Consequently, in this monograph I take an extended case study approach to the concept of forced migration in light of the 2002 massacre in Bellavista-Chocó-Colombia<sup>12</sup>. I study this massacre to disentangle the conceptual and socio-geo-historical dimensions silenced in the prevailing intellectual frameworks of what social scientists and politicians called today forced migration, a phenomenon experienced by about 4 million people in Colombia, and 27.1 million people in the world. I explore the importance of ethno-historical case studies to offer a more nuanced analysis of the realities of deracinated populations condemned to be ignored either because they are considered ‘hard to quantify’ (Castles 2003: 15) or because the complex causes that inform them are not easily captured in the prevailing labels (Black 1998) (Myers and Kent, 1995), and are therefore left out of the mainstream debate. Hence, this inquiry dwells on the limitation of current epistemic and political-legal frameworks to comprehensively answer and radically transform the realities of those forced to deracinate from their land.

Their deracination mainly induced by, classed, racialized, gendered, political and economic violence, and the impact of environmental disasters. Put differently, current frameworks are neither fair theorizing the histories of the people being abused, raped, taken away from their property, and killed systematically, nor are they designing effective policy prescriptions to repair the damage such experiences have produced. Even simpler, because current epistemic and legal frameworks do little to contribute to the respect of the lives, and dignity of the peoples affected to treat them as *human beings*. Therefore we need new and enhanced categories, and theories to comprehend multiple dislocations and their long dureé.

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<sup>12</sup> See annex, map # 2

This inquiry depicts first, the global dimensions of this phenomenon *vis-à-vis* a critical interpretation of the conceptual dimensions of the categories used to comprehend it. I examine the need to identify the silenced conceptual, geographical, and historical layers of meaning to assess the pertinence of prevailing intellectual frameworks. Second, I highlight the need to move beyond both the Sociology of Forced Migration and the core theoretical framework of Migration Studies as a whole by considering the sociological importance of contextual categories such as Destierro, and Diaspora. I reflect on two questions. First, *why* should we unthink the prevailing intellectual and political model condensed in the concept of forced migration? And *how* can we unthink and transcend the barriers created by the intellectual and political model of thought embedded in the concept?

### **The Empirical Subject**

THE MASSACRE OF BELLAVISTA AS A NON-EVENT OF FORCED MIGRATION: This thesis is an extended case-based study of a massacre. In the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May of 2002 119 people were massacred in the community church of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó- Colombia<sup>13</sup>. Approximately 1.744 families had to abandon the territory to escape the atrocity of this event. After this day they entered into the category of forced displacement. Like the population of Bellavista, 27.1 million people in 54 countries have lost their territories, and are also considered ‘displaced’. Among the six largest ‘internally displaced populations’ are Sudan, Colombia, Iraq, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Pakistan<sup>14</sup>. In Colombia, the massacre of Bellavista raised challenging questions about the nature of what the politicians of the time called

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<sup>13</sup> See AnnexMap No. 2 Map of the Community of Bellavista

<sup>14</sup> IDMC(The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre)-NRC. *Internal Displacement. Global Overview of trends and developments in 2009*. IDMC-NRC. <http://www.internal-displacement.org>



‘acts of terrorism’, the abandonment of the state, and the corruption in the state of Chocó, about racism, marginalization, and the question of Destierro. During the 7<sup>th</sup> commemoration of this horrifying event in 2009 explanations of what happened, and the procedure to repair the inhabitants affected still remained unsolved.

The use of journalism, sociology and anthropology to study this event has contributed to reaffirm that the massacre is an effect of the growing armed conflict in the country. The history is constantly overlooked. Little has been said about the historical continuities and discontinuities of colonial capitalism, racialized colonialization, class, racial, sexual, gender, and generational exploitation this case reveals<sup>15</sup>. ( Almario 2004 )(Escobar 2004) (Oslender 2004) (Arboleda 2004; 2007). It seems like the history of colonialization, and racialization on the region of the Bajo Atrato River<sup>16</sup>, and of the state of Chocó itself, and its significance for the world political economy is invisible to most social scientists devoted to study the case of Bellavista, and the analogous cases in different regions of world. The research done on the case of Bellavista in a period of eight years has isolated the event from the history of the region in which it occurred. The same pattern could be found in cases with similar characteristics all over Latin America, South Asia, and Africa (Marfleet 2007:136). Therefore, this case enlightens current debates on the need for a theoretical reflection about what constitutes a refugee, a forced migrant, or a forced displaced person. In addition, it serves as a gateway to continue crafting a theory of Afrodescendent and Indigenous Diasporas in Colombia ( Villa 2004) (Almario 2005) (Arboleda 2007) ( Lao-Montes 2008).

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<sup>15</sup> A more detailed description of the case statement is introduced in Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Annex Map No. 2

## **For an Analytics**

### **Historical analysis to unthink and deconstruct forced migration**

The concept of forced migration, and its types need to be un-thought, and the field de-colonized both epistemically & politically. In the first epigraph of this chapter I introduced a core statement by the Haitian Anthropologist Michel- Rolph Trouillot about the importance of the production of history as a fruit of power and the necessity of exposing its roots to challenge its invisibility. His claim raises this major question for activists, scholars, and policy makers working with populations historically victims of land dispossession, or any other kind of social force inducing violent people's dislocation.

Building on this statement, I aim to outline the theoretical infirmity in the concepts underlying the research and policies produced in the field of Forced Migration. My initial suspicion is that the main rationales in which this concept is founded have contributed to the continued exploitation and pillage of the populations it is meant to protect<sup>17</sup>. Exposing the historical roots of this phenomenon serves as an opening to unveil the constellation of knowledge and power dynamics shaping the emergence and constitution of this field of research. For the case of Bellavista, revealing the roots of the history of land dispossession in the Bajo Atrato River region offers historical patterns of colonial capitalism, racial exploitation, as well as social mobilization for decolonialization, to comprehend current violent events such as massacres, massive evictions, and claims of land ownership by foreigners with false documentation.

Numerous scholars have argued that those events are leading to 'forced displacements' and 'forced migration' of survivors. However, historicizing these events will help us understand

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<sup>17</sup> This chapter does not engage in the debate about the transition from Refugee Studies to Migration studies, but it borrows major arguments from it

their significance in a more complex socio-economic, political, legal, historical, and cultural context. Describing violent events, such as massacres in isolation, as new incidents, obscures or limits the possibility of critical historical sociological theorizing. It also obscures the possibility of producing alternative discourses for social mobilization, and social transformation. From this perspective, new debates, and a new range of strategies to transform realities of death into existences of dignity could be opened. Transitioning from the use of history as an analytic to unthink forced migration, to the actual historical analysis of the case in question is the vertebral column of this monograph.

The second epigraph of this chapter introduces Immanuel Wallerstein's proposal of unthinking nineteenth-century social sciences. This theoretical and philosophical strategy, as well as the deconstructive strategy of the French philosopher J. Derrida's, and the concept of the colonality of power of the Peruvian sociologist A. Quijano's set the first major set of analytics I aim to follow to propose and afrodiasporic decolonial critique of the field of forced Migration. Let me elaborate.

A second moment of the debate undertaken in this chapter is founded on the voices of the women of Bellavista narrating their experiences, the concept of *Destierro* of Afrocolombian historian Santiago Arboleda, and the concept of Diaspora of Puerto Rican sociologist Agustin Lao-Montes to expose the roots of the history of land dispossession in the Colombian Pacific. I will elaborate this statement on chapter3.

### **Why am I tying unthinking and Deconstruction to the Colonality of Power?**

I am interested on developing and analytical schema to substantiate the sociological significance of exposing dubious and narrow-minded approaches in the dominant perspective of the field of Forced Migration. This exposure must be accompanied by a proposal to generate critical categories of socio-historical analysis. My use of the notion of unthinking is the first step to extend an invitation to

revisit the field of Forced Migration after hundreds of articles have been published; voices have been silenced, the number of victims increases every day, and when the strategies of dislocation diversify. This strategy appeals for a critical thought about the disconnection between the advance in the literature and the empirical proliferation of the phenomenon. The deconstructive strategy comes in as ‘an unclosed, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation, and writing’ (Derrida 1983; 40). This should offer tools to analyze the specific texts we will be encountering both to expose, and subvert the binary oppositions undergirding the dominant ways of thinking in this field.

I am using A. Quijano’s concept of the colonality of power as a tool to world-historical analysis (Lao 2008). A. Quijano establishes a direct link between the imposition of racial classifications and the emergence of the colonality of power, as a permanent extension of the relations of subalternity created during the colonialism. He also traces how these patterns of power configure Latin American & Caribbean’s institutions, forms of authority, modalities of exploitation, and the challenges that have been born in the center of long time exploited populations. He argues that colonality is based on the imposition of a racial/ ethnic classification of the global population as the cornerstone of that model of power. It operates on every level, in every arena and dimension (both material and subjective of everyday social existence, and does so on a societal scale) (20).

The combined use of these analytics must contribute to dispel from the core of sociological thinking and policy making ahistorical conceptualizations of the phenomenon many call Forced Migration. This is both an intellectual and a political imperative to question *how a dispossessed can be considered a migrant; to what extent ‘labeling’ the survivors of economic and political*

*violence, development projects, and natural disasters as forced migrants produces a constrictive and hazardous intellectual and legal-political framework that substantiates their subordination?*

### **Working questions and hypotheses**

**Why should we unthink the prevailing intellectual and political model condensed in the concepts of forced displacement and forced migration?**

The first reason why we should unthink/ deconstruct the notion of Forced Migration is because it is conceptually dubious and narrow-minded.

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) describes Forced Migration as

*‘a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (those displaced by conflicts) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects<sup>18</sup>.’*

There could be also found a second definition

*“Forced migration (also called deracination - originally a French word meaning uprooting) refers to the coerced movement of a person or persons away from their home or home region. It often connotes violent coercion, and is used interchangeably with the terms "displacement" or forced displacement. A specific form of forced migration is population transfer, which is a coherent policy to move unwanted persons, perhaps as an attempt at "ethnic cleansing". Someone who has experienced forced migration is a "forced migrant" or "displaced person" ”<sup>19</sup>*

This second notion mentions the concept of deracination as another way to name this phenomenon. However, no major differentiations are introduced, when in fact there are important differences among the processes each concept allows us to comprehend. I will undertake this debate in Chapter 3. In addition to these definitions there is a typology of the people affected.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.forcedmigration.org/webguide/>

<sup>19</sup> Butts, Alexander. *Forced Migration and Global Politics*. Wiley-Blackwell.

**Table 1. Types of forced migrants and Internally Displaced Persons <sup>20</sup>**

Types of Forced Migration	Types of forced migrants	Internally Displaced Persons	Components of the definitions
Conflict-Induced Displacement	Refugees	Development displacees	<p>*The coercive or otherwise involuntary character of the movement</p> <p>*In the case of internal displacement, the fact that such movement takes place within national borders.</p> <p>*The immediate, and sometimes assumed, force inducing the movement (Conflict, Development, Disaster)</p>
Development-Induced Displacement	Asylum seekers	Development displacees	
Disaster-Induced Displacement		Environmental and disaster displacees	
		Smuggled people	
		Trafficked people	

Among this typology I focus on the IDPs (Internally Displaced Populations).

In what pertains to Forced Displacement, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement say:

*“Internally displaced persons are “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.”<sup>21</sup>*

Both notions identify the external force inducing the forced dislocation of the population, in a timeless fashion, and leave out the complexity of socio-economic processes that have preceded ‘the armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters’ it identifies as the cause of the problem. The concept and the proposed

<sup>20</sup> Table constructed based on the information offered by the Forced Migration web guide op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> (<http://www.internal-displacement.org> *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Introduction, pag. 2*). This definition was postulated in the 1992 report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

typology is analytically, and empirically misleading. It has been useful as a legal and political concept to formulate policies of temporal protection, but restricted to comprehend the complex structural, institutional, and every day dimensions of the phenomenon. Less effective has it been to repair the populations persecuted, and to promote profound, long term transformations of their living conditions. After highlighting similar limitations P. Hurton argues “I do not conclude from all this that we should throw out the term ‘forced migrant’ and replace with something else. It is probably the best term available. But we should be aware of the conceptual difficulties it raises and not assume that it refers that to a clearly discriminable class of events. It is a useful shorthand term-what Wittgenstein called an ‘odd job word’- which cannot be defined analytically but which allows us to bring together a whole range of overlapping ideas and events which don’t have any single characteristic in common but which are connected to each other like members of a family-they have ‘family likenesses’ ” (2003;10).

Nonetheless, I do conclude that we should seriously consider calling migrants to long term dispossessed, and abused populations. I think that insisting on theorizing their experience as ‘forced migration’ is a sociological legitimization of a deathly economic exploitation. It makes us accomplices of it.

In the last two decades the multiple perspectives converging in the field of Forced Migration have put forward diverse agendas for research and policy making to attend millions of human beings victims of this phenomenon (Refugee Studies Centre, 2010). Over the course of these two decades social sciences have seen the birth of migration agencies, databases of all sorts, digital libraries; Forced Migration studies programs, research centers, and monitoring centers of the global politics of Forced Migration. The monumental efforts of several community organizations, parish groups, state-sponsored research groups, NGOs, research centers,

university departments, and journals at core institutions, and universities have translated into the production of one of the most complete records of reference data and background analysis on population ‘movements’ (Oxford, 2010), UNHCR (February 2007b), UNHCR (September 2009).

There has been a growing literature concentrated on the production of guiding principles of forced displacement, humanitarian principles to protect human rights, and to create spaces of protection in war zones; concepts of protection, the legal and institutional challenges to realizing protection, and strategies to assess it have emerged from this field. Efforts without which the humanitarian tragedy, and the war crimes, the world knows today as forced displacement would, certainly, be much worst (Wagner, J. I., 2005) (Evans, G.,2008), (UN Department of Public Information, July 2009), (Zetter, R. and Boano, C.,2009), (Feller, E. 2009). Contemporary reflections on the emergent trends of this field state how the proposed agendas to the management of international, and national forced migration remains a formidable challenge for the community, in which central questions are: **a)** in what terms are we to develop comprehensive migration management strategies that will help us achieve coherence of action?; **b)** What organizing principles should be adopted?; **c)** Is there, in conceptual terms, a point of leverage to move the debate forward? (IOM. 2008). Additionally, the latest published overview of the current trends and future directions of research and policies focused on forced migration states that those are: *State fragility and forced migration*, the economics of forced migration, environmental displacement , displaced groups with specific needs, durable solutions, humanitarian space and spaces of protection, and realising protection: legal and institutional challenges.



A Sociology of Forced Migration has been proposed from the core of the mainstream of the interdisciplinary field of Forced Migration. A ‘sociology of exile, displacement, and belonging (...) understood as a sociology of forced migration in the context of global transformation’(Castles 2003;14). S. Castles also states that we need a sociological argument, that points to the significance of forced migration in contemporary society and in current processes of change’(Castles 2003;16).

Decades have passed since national and international legal norms have been proposed, approved, and compiled to *diminish* the impact of this worldwide phenomenon (OACNUDH/ACNUR/CODHES 2001). Few have been the deep-seated improvements in the lives, and regions of the victims of a historical continuum of pillage expressed in massacres, genocides, ethnic cleansings, and acts of land dispossession. The components of the definitions presented above illustrate the absence of a systematic historical analysis to connect the processes, the victims, and the geopolitical contexts in which they take place. Besides, there is not a differentiation of the class, gender, and racial dimensions establishing differences among the victims to comprehensively study this worldwide phenomenon. These presumptions, once considered useful to help victims of violence, environmental disasters, and development projects, today are the central intellectual, and political barriers to useful analysis of the social world, and its transformation. Even though the types of forced migration have been questioned, little attention has been invested in what are their effects. I argue that the reduced importance to the critics of this typology is located first, in the way in which the problem has been framed. Second, because the critique made refers to populations historically marginalized and exploited.

While arguing for a Sociology of Forced Migration S. Castles states

“Then there are types of forced migration which are hard to quantify. Millions of people are displaced every year by development projects such as dams, airports, roads, luxury housing, conservation areas and game parks. The World Bank puts their number at 10 million a year. Some are able to rebuild their livelihood, but many experience permanent impoverishment and marginalization (Cernea and McDowell, 2000; World Commission on Dams, 2000). Typically, it is rural dwellers, ethnic minorities and indigenous people who suffer ‘in the national interest’, while elites and transnational companies benefit (Roy, 1999). In addition, many people have to migrate because of environmental degradation, natural disasters and industrial accidents or pollution. In such cases, it is extremely hard to distinguish between environmental, economic and political factors, so that the label ‘environmental refugee’ is misleading and even damaging, since it can divert attention from complex causes (Black, 1998; Myers and Kent, 1995).” (Castles 2003; 15)

Not only the label of ‘environmental refugee’ is misleading, the entire typology of ‘forced migration’, and therefore of ‘forced migrants’ is misleading and constrictive. Labeling *migrants* the victims of land dispossession, the populations left in locations of vulnerability to be violently disseminated by natural disasters, and those forced to either contribute, or to open space for ‘development’ to occur, is a harmful proposition. Such characterization contributes, first, to preserve the status quo of not investigating certain populations arguing they are in spaces considered extremely violent and isolated. Second, the complexity of social forces, and historical processes informing the realities of these populations and spaces is such that few are committed to assert its sociological significance.

These observations ought to enhance the understanding of the theoretical issues at the core of this field. To explore the empirical validity of these statements the research should ask subsequently: who are those called forced migrants? Where are they located? What are their socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious histories? What does make them potential ‘forced migrants’ and not other populations of other classes, races, genders, sexualities, and locations?

**Global trends of forced migration: When the ‘Darker races of the world’, the ‘Wretched of the earth’, and the ‘People without history’ met the IDP’s (internally displaced peoples)**

The second reason why we should unthink/ deconstruct the notion of Forced Migration is because at the same time that it serves humanitarian purposes, it legitimizes and contributes to the exploitation of the victims they aim to protect. Scholars of the TWAIL -Third World Approaches to International Law- have argued that even though this field has contributed to the above described humanitarian effects, it has served also to the geopolitics of hegemonic states. (Chimni, B. (2009)<sup>22</sup> . The first reinforced area of research and policy of the current trends of mainstream approaches to forced migration is the relation between ‘state fragility’ and forced migration. The response to this call for research and action from institutions such as the World Bank and USAID allows me to suggest that the proposed solutions to these phenomenon contribute to a new version of a civilizatory mission to spaces that in previous centuries have been emptied epistemologically, and cartographically, to be portrayed, afterwards, as spaces for conquest and exploration (O’Gorman 1961). (E. Galeano, 1974) (Dussel 1992, 1996, 1998) (Grucinski 1999), (Hulme 2004), ( Said 1978 ) (McClintock 1995) (Quijano 2000), and as developmentizables space ( Escobar, 1995, 2009).

Accordingly, the second layer of meaning silenced in the conceptual framework, in which Forced Migration stands, is the geographical distribution of the population labeled as ‘forced migrant’, and the role of their regions in the world-economy. The conceptualization of this phenomenon limits the possibility of analyzing how those called forced migrants are also the

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<sup>22</sup> B. Chimni in this articulate starts to historicize the transition from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies as “the birth of a ‘discipline’”

long term wounded by inequality. The W. E. B. DuBois' 'darker races of the world',<sup>23</sup> and the F. Fanon's 'wretched of the earth',<sup>24</sup> and the Erik Wolfs' 'people without history' <sup>25</sup>are increasingly the victims of new and contemporary forms of land dispossession, Destierro, and

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<sup>23</sup> Among W. E. B. Du Bois' contributions to radical politics and critical social theory, the concept of the 'Darker people of the world' offers a keystone to identify the population that is affected by the gendered and racialized colonization of the world both in the colonial and post-colonial period. In his analysis of White supremacy, in the *Souls of the white folks*, he asserts 'the European world is using black and brown for all the uses which men know. Slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that 'darkies' are born beasts of burden for white folk. It were silly to think otherwise, cries the cultured world, with stronger and shriller accord. The supporting arguments grow and twist themselves in the mouths of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer, and missionary: Darker people are dark in mind as well as in body; of dark, uncertain, and imperfect descent; of frailer, cheaper stuff; they are cowards in the face of mausers and maxims; they have no feelings, aspirations, and loves; they are fools, illogical idiots- 'half-devil and half-child. Such as they are civilization must, naturally, raise them, but in soberly and in limited ways. They are not simply dark white men. They are not 'men' in the sense that Europeans are men. To the very limited extend of their shallow capacities lift them to be useful to whites, to raise cotton, gather rubber, fetch ivory, dig diamonds-and let them be paid what men think they are worth-white men who know them to be well-nigh worthless. (DuBois 1920;460).

In addition to this quote I would like to introduce R. Rabaka's description of W.E.B. Dub'ois' understanding of white supremacy to present his arguments in its complexity. R. Rabaka states Du Bois declared, "whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" (1995a, p. 454). Here he is sardonically hinting at the cardinal difference between white supremacy and most other forms of racism: its worldwide historical, cultural, social, political, legal, and economic influence and impact. White supremacy serves as the glue that connects and combines racism to colonialism, and racism to capitalism. It has also been illustrated that it exacerbates sexism by sexing racism and racing sexism, to put it unpretentiously. Thus, white supremacy as a global racism intersects and interconnects with sexism, and particularly patriarchy as a global system that oppresses and denies women's human dignity and right to be humanly different from men, the ruling gender (Davis 1981, 1989; hooks 1981, 1984, 1991, 1995; J.A. James 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; Lorde 1984, 1988; Rabaka 2003e, 2004)." ( Rabaka 2007; 3)

<sup>24</sup> In the *Wretched of the Earth*, F. Fanon describes the racialization of spaces to differentiate those in which the oppressed live from the colonizer's. He describes the colonial world as a compartmentalized world divided in two, inhabited by different species, governed and ordered by violence of the colonial world. He emphasizes ' the colonial world is a compartmentalized world. It is obviously as superfluous to recall the existence of 'native' towns and European towns, of schools for 'natives' and schools for Europeans, as it is to recall apartheid in South Africa. Yet if we penetrate inside this compartmentalization we shall at least bring to light some of its key aspects. By penetrating its geographical configuration and classification we shall be able to delineate the backbone on which the decolonized society is reorganized" (Fanon 1963; 3)

<sup>25</sup> In the same vein of W.E. B. DuBois', and F. Fanon's concept to map global inequality, Erik Wolf's concept of 'the people without history' highlights how certain populations considered lacking a formally written history like the 'Western' historical narratives are left out of the narration of the world history and its progress. He argues "we have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. (...)Such a developmental scheme is misleading.(...). By turning name into things we create false models of realities.(...) Thus it becomes to sort the world into differently colored balls, to declare that 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet'." (Wolf; 1982;5-6)

Diasporic Deracination<sup>26</sup>. According to the Internal Displacement Monitor Centre–IDMC’- 2009 Global overview of trends of development of forced displacement, listing them in an order from higher to lower, 11.6 millions of Africans are registered as internally displaced, 5 million people in the Americas, 4.3 million people in Asian Pacific, and 2.4 million people in Europe<sup>27</sup>.

**Map 1: Map of the global dimensions of forced displacements** <sup>28</sup>



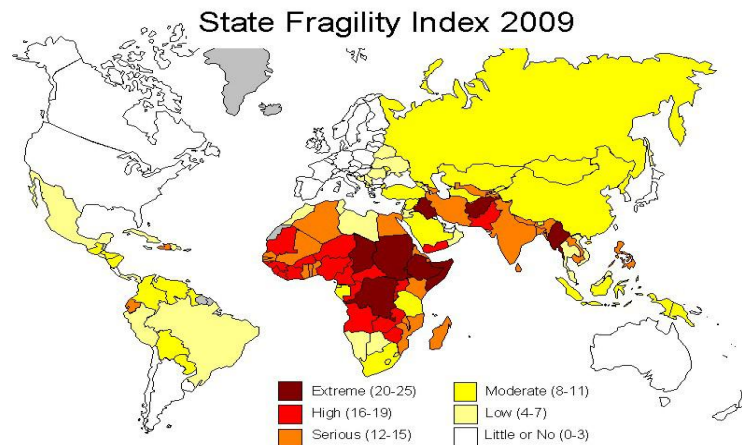
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<sup>26</sup> For the concept of diasporic deracination see Kauanui, J. Khaulani “To deracinate is to displace a people from their own territory, place or environment – literally, to uproot”(139) . Kauanui, J. Khaulani “ Diasporic Deracination and ‘Off-island Hawaiians”. *The contemporary Pacific*. Volume 19, Number1, Spring 2007. Pp. 138-160

<sup>27</sup> IDMC, Opc. Cit.

<sup>28</sup> IDMC- International Displacement Monitoring Centre. “ Global Overview” (Interactive map). *International Displacement: Global Overview of trends of development in 2009*. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/> (Consulted January, 2010), May 2010.

## Map 2: State Fragility Index 2009, © 2010 Center for Systemic Peace



Similar regions are targeted when it refers to ‘state fragility’. According to the Center for Systematic Peace, the rate of forced migration is positively correlated to the fragility of the generator state

“USAID uses the term fragile states to refer generally to a broad range of failing, failed, and recovering states. However, the distinction among them is not always clear in practice, as fragile states rarely travel a predictable path of failure and recovery, and the labels may mask substate and regional conditions (insurgencies, factions, etc.) that may be important factors in conflict and fragility. It is more important to understand how far and quickly a country is moving from or toward stability than it is to categorize a state as failed or not. Therefore, the strategy distinguishes between fragile states that are vulnerable from those that are already in crisis” (USAID 2005:1) <sup>29</sup>

As a consequence, the tendencies marked in the map of the Global Dimensions of Forced Displacement, and the State Fragility Index are the same, or should. However, serious contradictions rise when comparing the maps.

Among these countries, Colombia has the highest degree of ambiguity to calculate the percentage of the displaced population. It has the second highest percentage of IDPs, but is

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<sup>29</sup> USAID. Fragile States Strategy. January 2005.  
[http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005\\_fragile\\_states\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005_fragile_states_strategy.pdf)

considered a ‘moderate fragile state’. This example will be the lead to reinforce the statement of the double functionality of this field: serving humanitarian purposes, as well as the - imperial- geopolitical interests of the -imperial- states. USAID in its program for strengthening ‘fragile states’ offers the main example I could use to support this argument. This agency has built a direct connection between the countries from which ‘forced migrants’ run away, and the spaces in which ‘terrorism’ is more likely to grow. They write:

“Fragile states have posed a growing problem since the end of the Cold War, but they are now recognized as a source of our nation’s most pressing security threats. There is perhaps no more urgent matter facing USAID than fragile states, yet no set of problems is more difficult and intractable. Twenty-first century realities demonstrate that ignoring these states can pose great risks and increase the likelihood of terrorism taking root”

(USAID 2005:1)

Colombia’s IDP’s percentage is ranked from 3,303,979 to 4,915,579. The former calculated base of the registry of the state through Acción Social<sup>30</sup>, the later calculated by CODHES<sup>31</sup>.

The 2009 report of the Monitoring Committee says:

“Internal displacement currently affects 6 to 10% of the national population. According to CODHES, in 2009, 286,389 people were newly displaced, adding to previous displacement to create a total number of 4,915,579. 2008 thus brought a decrease of 24% compared to 2008, and the rate of displacement per 100,000 inhabitants decreased from 713 in 2008 to 660 in 2009. Government figures for 2009 differ significantly from CODHES’s, registering a total of 122,398 for the year. The total, cumulative figure also varies significantly, as the governments registers a total of 3,303,979 to December 2009. 2008 and 2009 government figures are influenced by the decision of the Consejo de Estado that invalidated Decree 2569 of 2000, and by the Constitutional Court’s Auto 011. (See previous section entitled ‘Rules on IDP registration and their impact on official IDP figures’) Nevertheless, currently, the rates of under-registration are substantially high. The national-survey by the Civil Society Follow-up Commission showed

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<sup>30</sup> The agency created by the government of President Uribe Velez to redirect funds from Plan Colombia-funded by the US- to serve ‘social’ causes, such as ‘forced displacement.

<sup>31</sup> Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Colombian NGO advocating for Human Rights and against Forced Displacement). On May 24, 2010 the director of this organization was victim of an attempt of murder. This act was attributed to the Paramilitary group ‘Aguilas Negras’.

that the 65,7% of IDPs are registered in the RUPD, and the rest (34,3%) is not. Of the not-registered IDPs, 72,8% did not declare its situation of displacement to the relevant authorities, and 26,2% declared but was not included in the Registry' (Comisión de Seguimiento, 30 April 2009, pp. 50).

Despite this ambiguity<sup>32</sup> and high rate of 'forced displacement' Colombia is considered a 'moderate fragile' state in front of a supposed 'extreme fragile' state such as Zimbabwe, whose IDP's is ranked between 570,000-1,000,000. Noting the growing impact of these narratives, and the growing discourses arguing for now going to save those fragile states emanating from institutions such as the World Bank, and USAID, completes my critique of the significance of a geographical analysis, as a second silenced layer of meaning within the field of Forced Migration. The deriving analytics to supersede this limitation could be found on F. Coronil's proposal of imagining nonimperial geohistorical categories. In his analyzes of the occidental imperial categories he argues that maps have often served as a medium for representing the world as well as for problematizing its representation (52). Paraphrasing, F. Coronil writes that the unwieldy map is eventually abandoned and is worn away by the corrosive force of time even before the decline of the empire itself. Thus, history makes the map no longer accurate, or perhaps turns it into a hyperreal representation that prefigures the empire's dissolution. This effect is achieved in part by the associations they conjure up as a group of terms. Often combined into binary sets, these sets forge links in a paradigmatic chain of conceptions of geography, history, and personhood that reinforces each link and produces an almost tangible and inescapable image of the empire. Coronil's claims constitute an important tool to criticize the so-called isolation of regions like the Colombian Pacific, and as a consequence the justification of its *natural* (in Quijano's sense) marginality and ignorance of the population, and to unthink the argument that these 'kind' of regions offer the conditions for 'terrorism taking root'.

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<sup>32</sup> CODHES: The numbers don't add up. December 10, 2008. <http://blog.usofficeoncolombia.com/2008/12/codhes-numbers-dont-add-up.html>



### **On the Historical layer of meaning**

The third silenced layer of meaning in the mainstream conceptualization of Forced Migration is historical analysis. Arguably, the concepts of forced migration and forced displacements are limited to explain the complexity of Destierro/ Deracination as a world-historical reality. Their analytical scope is narrow to make sense of the isolated facts and observations summarized on the table No 2 below, for the case of this monograph. In this table I summarize major events of land dispossession occurred in a radio of four centuries in the region in which Bellavista is located. I depart from the year in which the massacre occurred backwards until the sixteenth-century.

I introduce these bits of the history of the region to contend that it is not possible to articulate a relevant sociological analysis in the absence of historical categories capable of comprehending how and why these events are related. The prevailing categories are unable to explain how countries and populations with similar histories of racialization, conquest, and domination are the targets of 'old' and 'new' forms of dislocation. Hence we need categories such as Destierro and Diasporic deracination that comprehend historical process and social complexity.

**Table 2- Summary of key events of Destierro(Deracination) in the Bojaya Region**

<b>EVENTS</b>	
<b>XXI Century:</b>	The Afrodescendants settle in the community of Bellavista, and surroundings communities, in May 2 <sup>nd</sup> of <b>2002</b> were ‘displaced’ of their territory after the massacre of approximately 119 inhabitants.
<b>XX Century:</b>	In the period know as <i>La Violencia</i> (The Violence), exactly in January 1 <sup>st</sup> of <b>1952</b> , it is said that the communities of Bojayá and Bebará disappeared due to and killings produced by individuals and redoubts of cuadrilles of killers coming from Antioquia <sup>33</sup> .
<b>XVII- XVIII Centuries:</b>	<p>After the defeat, and “pacification” of the Indigenous populations of the region, and the enslavement of the Africans in their Diaspora in its pick, the exploitation gold marks another series of events, let say of “displacement” both of the inhabitants, and the region, particularly when contraband started to represent a threat to the Spanish Crown. The description about how the Spanish Crown tried to prevent the contraband trade with the Dutch merchants highlights the acts of land dispossession in the region:</p> <p>Boyd-Bowman &amp; Sharp write “(u)nable to guarantee the loyalty of officials in this isolated gold producing region, Crown authorities sought instead to make illegal shipments to and from the providence easy to detect.” (6) “Although the vigias did not prevent contraband trade, they did prevent the legal passage of merchandise, observers, and passengers into de Chocó by way of the river highways. (...) The Chocó was cut off from outside by geographical barriers and Crown regulations (...). Isolation, wealth and mystery continued as the prevailing view in the Chocó” (7).</p> <p>The vigia founded to prevent contraband trade was located in the piece of land that exists until today called “Vigia del Fuerte”, community located in front of the community of Bellavista.</p>

<sup>33</sup> Even though this mention requires a more complex description to determine the exact location that is referred as Bojayá, it is one of the few evidences of the impact of violence in the region during this period. This annotation could be found in Guzmán Campos, Germán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña . “La violencia en otras regiones”. *La Violencia en Colombia .Estudio de u proceso social*. Tomo I p. 96

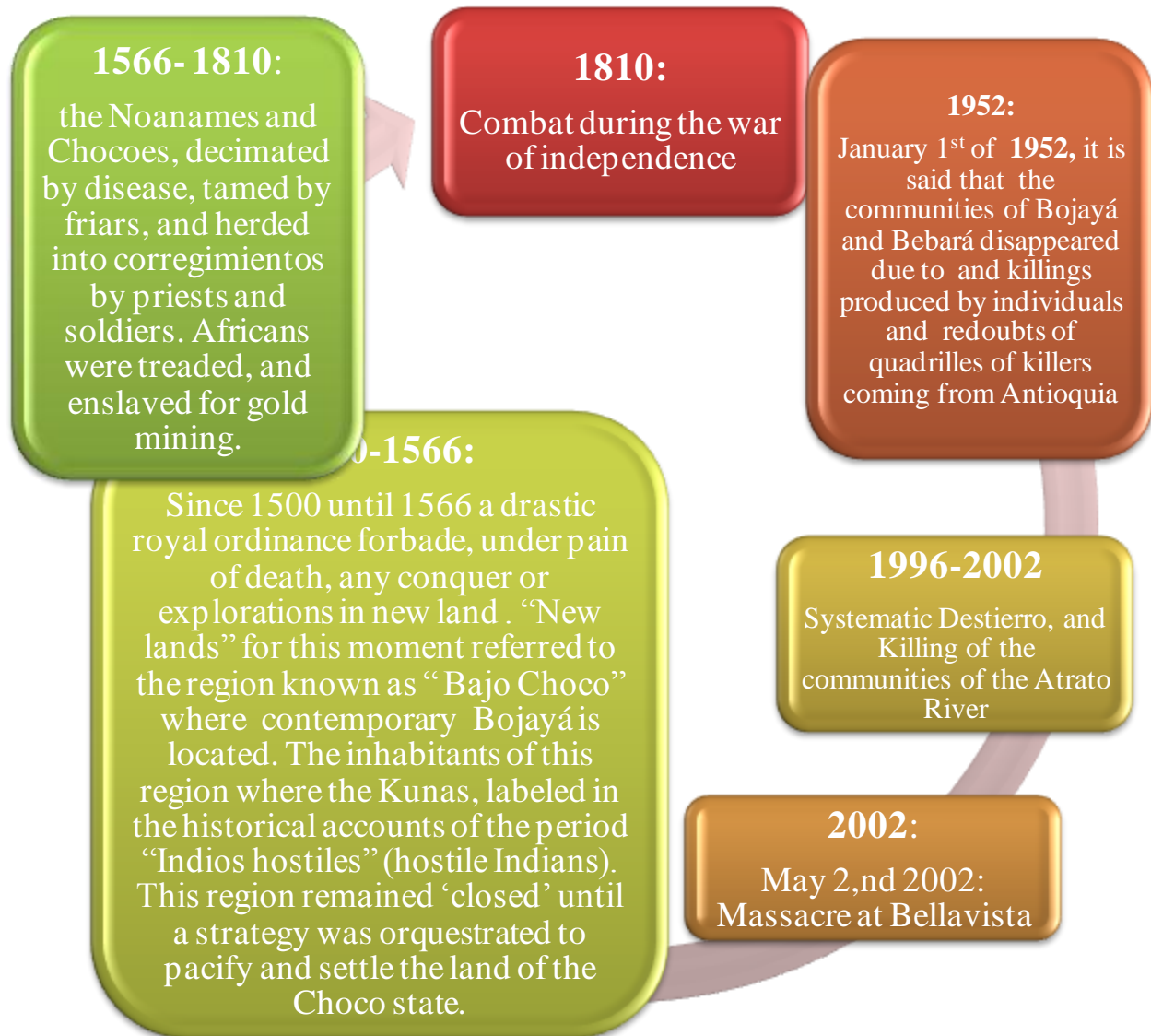
<p><b>XVI</b></p> <p><b>Century:</b></p>	<p>Since 1500 until 1566 a drastic royal ordinance forbade, under pain of death, any conquer or explorations in new land <sup>34</sup>. “New lands” for this moment referred to the region known as “ Bajo Choco” where contemporary Bojayá is located. The inhabitants of this region where the Kunas, labeled in the historical accounts of the period “Indios hostiles” (hostile Indians). This region remained ‘closed’ until a strategy was orchestrated to pacify and settle the provinces of the Choco and Chancos Indias.</p> <p>In the Introduction to the SUNY Description, a more illustrative account of the moment is written, it says:</p> <p><i>“ in the sixteenth century several well known attempts to secure the Chocó, including those by Pascual Andagoya, Captain Melchor Velásquez, set the pattern for hardship and failure.(...) All three expeditions ended in disaster as an estimated two-thirds of the soldiers who entered to Chocó with the fanatical captain died of hunger, disease or Indian attack (...) Despite the hardships and examples of failure and death, gold continued to draw adventurers. By the end of the seventeenth century solders, miners, priests and officials had conquered the Indians of the central Chocó. They did not defeat the Cuna Indians near the mouth of the Atrato River, but the Noanames and Chocoes, decimated by disease, tamed by friars, and herded into corregimientos<sup>35</sup> by priests and soldiers, offered little resistance to future Spanish encroachment” (3)“Spaniards who entered to Chocó gave and contracted smallpox and were particularly susceptible to many tropical fevers. Because seventeenth-and-eighteenth century accounts describe the Chocó simply as fever-ridden (...) (4<sup>36</sup>).</i></p>
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<sup>34</sup> This royal ordinance was communicated through the “Cedula Real de 31 de Diciembre de 1549. Footnote # 12 in Romoli Kathleen. “ El Alto Chocó en el siglo XVI”. *Revista Colombiana de Antropologia*. Vol. XIX. Bogotá. Instituto Colombiano de Cultura. 1975. P. 14-16

<sup>35</sup> Small villages

<sup>36</sup> Boyd-Bowman, Peter M. & William Sharp. *Description of the province of Zitara and course of the Atrato River*. Special Studies Series. Council on Internacional Studies. State University of New York at Buffalo. 1981.

**Figure 2: Preliminary Schema of Historical Events of Destierro at the Bojayá Region 1500-2002**



How could we comprehend the functionality of land dispossession leaving out all the events preceding contemporary processes of the same characteristics? Naming long term practices of violent land dispossession as forced migration imposes a silence upon the local and world-historical significance of the events marked as such, in which a displacement has occurred. It creates a fixed narrative that decontextualizes and isolates events in which acts of violence are committed systematically. It sweetens the blood, the tears, and the horror that have been caused. Its use as analytical categories is limited to reveal the constellation of historical processes lying behind long term practices of violent land dispossession. It is also restricted to be used as a concept of liberation/transformation due to its lack of historicity, and to its ability to reinforce racialization, marginalization, and domination. As a result, let's say an unintended consequence of, this intellectual model is that it contributes to maintain projects of imperial expansion, and provides agendas of research, policy and practice for a continuing pillage, and genocide worldwide.

Jacques Derrida's deconstructive strategy<sup>37</sup> will be invoked here to examine the interpretations that have been produced, and to unveil those that have been silenced, ignored, marginalized, or underestimated. Ethno-historical research fleshes out how members of social groups construct their experiences, question, repudiate, and explain them in the context of larger historical, political, economic, cultural structures. By analyzing the accounts victims of land dispossession provide the researcher will be able to comprehend how meanings, of the experiences of dispossession, are constructed in the everyday life, and how social mobilization is crafted at the same time that violence is challenged. Therefore, the case of Bellavista offers a unique opportunity to explore historical forces, actors and factors, which established analytical frameworks have failed to fully

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origins*, trans. Mensh, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996 (MO).

explain towards the transformation of the societies affected. Following the typology offered by Forced Migration Online(FMO), the major data base of sources to study Forced Migration, Bellavista could be placed on all the categories of Forced Migration and its inhabitants could be located in all the types of forced migrants and internally displaced persons, and this framework is still limited to explain the serial occurrence of this phenomenon throughout the history of the region. Therefore, the main concept needs to be deconstructed and unthought, and more importantly, it offers no guide to contribute to the social mobilization that could cause its defeat.

The conceptual framework of forced migration has been one of the most important contributions the field has produced to support civilizing missions, and the need to create aid programs to ‘help’ the countries in which this victims are located. The rationale in which the notion of forced migration, and its types is founded is ahistorical. It allows scholars, policy makers, and politicians to renew narratives, and projects to help ‘vulnerable states’, ‘states in crisis’, and so on.

If the researcher traces the linkages between world-historical conjunctures<sup>38</sup> of capitalist expansion, and world-historical patterns of social mobilization of different populations, she/he will observe the resurgence of historical-emptied-spaces<sup>39</sup>, through the conception of their inhabitants as potential slaves, underdeveloped, refugees, and forced displaced people. This conception is particularly absent from this field. In addition, almost no research critically reflects

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<sup>38</sup> See Figure 1 and 2 for a development of this argument.

<sup>39</sup> I am using the working concept of historical-emptied spaces to name the territories where exploration, exploitation, violence, deracination, politics for development, and contestation for liberation coexist covered by the mantle of marginality, and barbarity. Put differently, historical-emptied-spaces are the cradles of the coloniality of power. Bassett, Thomas.1994. “Cartography building and Empire in Nineteenth-Century West Africa”, *Geographical Review*, Vol.84, No. 3(Jul., 1994), pp. 316-335

in the rationales of the major concepts used in this field that allow for such routinization of erasure, and epistemological silencing from occurring<sup>40</sup>.

Hence, when the 'darker races of the world', the 'wretched of the earth', and the 'people without history' meet the IDP's (internally displaced peoples) they realized they are the same. Different generations of the same extended family.

### **How can we unthink and transcend the barriers created by the intellectual and political model of thought embedded in the concepts of forced displacement and forced migration?**

#### *2.1.- A counterpoint<sup>41</sup> between Forced Displacement /Forced Migration and Destierro/Diaspora?.. What for?*

Alternative categories have been proposed to overcome these limitations. Here, I will introduce the Colombian debate around this matter. After 1996 the question of destierro has become a question of considerable historical importance in Colombia. Forced displacement, exile, forced migration, forced mobilization, migration, deterritorialization, and destierro have been some of the concepts employed by scholars, who study the armed conflict in Colombia, to name the phenomenon that has been stripping more than four million people in the national space. Along with the community organizations, a group of historians, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, and sociologists has emerged to point to the need of refocusing the studies of the effects of armed conflict, such as "displacement"<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> *Routinization of erasure, and epistemological silencing* are working concepts I am using to navigate the giant production of research on this field. Their primary purpose is to help me to conceptualize the continuing practice of silencing the past of the populations being defined as refugees, displaced, asylum seekers, forced migrants, and so forth. I aim to explore how the use of these categories routines a practice of *erasure* as oppose to engaging with *the long durée* of the history of those populations.

<sup>41</sup> (Ortiz; 1947 ) (Said; 1978 ) & ( Lao-Montes 2008)

<sup>42</sup> See the following selection: (ACIA, 2002), (Almarino, Oscar 2004) (Arboleda, Santiago, 2004 2007) (Escobar Arturo, 2004) (COCOMACIA, 2006) (CODHES, 1999) (COMISIÓN VIDA, JUSTICIA Y PAZ. 2002) (Diócesis de Quibdó, 2006) (Molano, Alfredo, 2001) (OPOCA, 1999) (Oslender, Ulrich 2004)

They suggest reviewing the epistemic importance of the use of the concept ‘forced displacement’. They consider that this notion constitutes an obstruction to understand the various dimensions of this phenomenon and its implications. They propose the notion of Destierro as a category with a more powerful explanatory power to analyze, describe and comprehend the actual situation in contexts of violence. As a result, the notion of Destierro is used to move forward an emergent trend in the Colombian studies of violence, approximately since 2002, after the question of how to comprehend experiences such as the Bellavista’s massacre hunted the field.

Afrocolombian historian Santiago Arboleda is one of the main critical scholars introducing the concept of Destierro, used by Afrodescendent communities, in the scholarly debate of Forced Migration. He describes Destierro as a phenomenon of prolonged historical projection, which emphasizes the centrality of the knowledge built by Afrodescendents, closely linked to the natural wealth of their ancestral environments in a defense of life. He argues that the notions of forced migration, and forced displacement are euphemisms for Destierro (deracination)<sup>43</sup>. S. Arboleda outlines an explanatory diagram of the reinterpretation of systematic process of Destierro experienced by Afro-Colombians during the nineteenth and twentieth century, to identify its antecedents in the slave trade or mass kidnapping of Africans in the fourteenth century. He suggests that there is a continuation of enslavement lying behind processes of land dispossession. Accordingly, he describes the historical, socio-anthropological, economical and environmental information of the management plans for the rivers Mayorquín and Raposo in the Pacific coast to comprehend the impact of Destierro in their lives. He relates the violent disintegration of these societies and the loss of their ancestral knowledge with their demand for

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<sup>43</sup> On chapter 3 I will address the significance of the politics of translation and translation as politics of diasporic mobilization.



reparations and compensation from the population. The author examines the role of traditional knowledge and ancestral strategies of resistance in the current atmosphere of war and deracination. He argues that 'displacement' cannot be considered as such because what is happening in contemporary time in the Pacific coast is articulated to a historical totality of domination. Thus, Destierro means "uprooting from the ground, to deracinate from the landscape, breaking the communal relations". I will build on Arboleda's notion of Destierro to suggest that this model serves as a valid categorical framework to analytically signify a problem that have affected a population that over the last thirty years have established a strong social movement around the defense of the territory.

### **From the critique to the proposal: For an Afrodiasporic Decolonial Critique of Forced Migration**

Building on the narratives of the interviewees I will argue that Destierro, as violence, is constitutive of the modernity/coloniality (Escobar 2004). It is a foundational political epistemic category constitutive of the diasporas, exiles, holocausts, ethnic cleansing, and genocide different societies have known through their histories. Consequently, the theoretical reflection of the empirical, legal, political, and historical usefulness of this, and the prevailing categories, becomes not only a need but a responsibility.

I will like to conceive this concept as a category of Afrodiasporic Decolonial Critique<sup>44</sup>. As a powerful concept from below arising from the bottom -of the river community life- up, to name and describe the killings, acts of violence and brutal appropriation of territories primarily at the Colombian Pacific coast. It expresses the uprooting of ancestral communities from their natives lands and the violent dispersion of the population. This notion is

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<sup>44</sup> I will elaborate the conceptual schema this perspective offers in chapter 3.

inspired by the beliefs, feelings, discourses, and practices embedded on the concepts of collective territory, ancestry, diaspora, memory, and community, which are affected when an act of mass killing and massive uprooting come into occurrence. It is part of the political imaginaries and epistemic perspectives that arise with particular social forces in a high moment of emergence of an Afrocolombian social movement since the early 1980s and late 1990s.

Hence, without denying the importance of the concepts of Forced Displacement/ Migration the strength of the proposition of Destierro as an analytical framework, to fully comprehend the massacre of Bellavista, and the process that it is part of, requires us to reverse the order of the actions and think this phenomenon not due to what it induces, but due to what it motivates, what it produces; where it comes from both in the current conjuncture (30 years) as well as in its *longue dureé*. This means, considering not only the mobilization (displacement) of those affected, but also the interests in land ownership and the strategies of killing to dispossess people from their land that has been worked and politicized for centuries by several communities of those W.E.B. DuBois called “the darker races of the world”, and Frantz Fanon “the wretched of the earth” (Destierro), and what it makes them (Desterrados), consistent with the breakaway of the historical relation with the territory and the construction of meanings of these populations.

In this way, I argue for analyzing the significance of the ruptures the process of Destierro generates. As suggested by the authors referenced, suffering, trauma and pain are social or moral dimensions produced by the detachment and fracture of families, communities and societies. Losses in human and material terms affect the subjectivity of the actors who are involved in the phenomenon. In contrast, forced migration/displacement as the main conceptual approach,

offers the analysis of a temporary condition that ceases, in most countries, after two years of being ‘displaced’, when supposedly the vulnerability is overcome. The condition of Destierro remarks the irreversibility and irreparability of this experience. As suggested by the ACIA (Asociación Campesina del Atrato/ Peasant Association of the Atrato River), S. Arboleda, Oscar Almario, Arturo Escobar<sup>45</sup> and as I have risen. The loss of the territory implies a rupture with the social constructions and meanings that in relation to it Afrodescendent and Indigenous communities have created. As a consequence, this case study permits to emphasize the significance of considering this process as a historical totality<sup>46</sup>, as a set of multiple processes not as a set of multiple conditions<sup>47</sup>. (Marx 1973)

There are two dimensions of my approach I will highlight: my notion of Destierro and Diaspora. My conception of Destierro considers three components of socio-historical analysis: power, knowledge, and liberation. Embedded on these components there are four dimensions: history and representation, memory, and mobilization. Additionally, I suggest that processes of Destierro take place in the bodies, the cultures and the territories.

Following these premises the major problems I underscore in this thesis are: Destierro as one of the foundations of the contemporary moment of the Afrocolombian Diaspora; as a historical formation, as a social relation of domination based on the marginalization/isolation of the other(s); as a historical process by which racial, sexual, class, gender, and spatial categories

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<sup>45</sup> op cit.

<sup>46</sup> ARBOLEDA, Santiago (2007): “Conocimientos ancestrales amenazados y destierro prorrogado: la encrucijada de los afrocolombianos”, en: MOSQUERA, Claudia y BARCELOS, Luiz Claudio (edit) *Afroreparaciones: Memorias de la esclavitud y Justicia Reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

<sup>47</sup> PÉREZ, Luis Eduardo (2001): “Una mirada empírica a los determinantes del desplazamiento forzado en Colombia”, en *Cuadernos de Economía*, Vol. XX, N° 35, Bogotá, Centro de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo – CID-, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, pp. 205-243

condense to design and produce a marginalized other and naturalize the condition of who deserves to live and who deserves to die; as a process of allocation of “targets” in cultures, bodies and territories; as a social relation of domination, as a mechanism, as well as a complex of social relationships that are the foundations of historical institutions trans-historically, and trans-locally founding and maintaining imperial formations, and modern nation-states.

My conception of Diaspora follows the characterization of the Puertorican sociologist Agustin Lao-Montes of Diaspora as a process, a condition, and a project of affinity. He says

“Patterson and Kelley argue that diaspora can be conceptualized both as **process** and **condition**(...) I will add a third dimension, the African Diaspora as a **project of affinity** and liberation founded on a translocal ideology of community-making and a global politics of decolonization. The African Diaspora can be conceived as a project of decolonization and liberation embedded in the cultural practices, intellectual currents, social movements, and political actions of Afro-diasporic subjects. The project of diaspora as a search for liberation and transnational community-making is grounded on the conditions of subalternization of Afrodiasporic peoples and in their historical agency of resistance and self affirmation. As a project the African diaspora is a north, a utopian horizon to Black freedom dreams<sup>48</sup>.

I propose to articulate S. Arboleda’s concept of Destierro and A. Lao-Montes’ concept of Diaspora to set the basis of an afrodiasporic decolonial critique of this field. From this epistemic perspective I link a set of concepts that are usually studied in isolation. I relate the history of land acquisition, territorial settlement, territory making, the impact of racialization, capitalism, and globalization to the production of knowledge of the region invaded, and pillaged.

A. Lao-Montes notion of African Diaspora allows us to comprehend Destierro as an strategy used for diasporization in long term processes of land dispossession, labor exploitation, and racial and

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<sup>48</sup> Montes, Agustin Lao. “Decolonial Moves. Translocating African Diaspora”. Cultural Studies Vol. 21, Nos. 2\_3 March/May 2007, pp. 309\_338

gender domination. S. Arboleda's notion of Destierro is also aiming to connect this phenomenon to the larger landscape of the African Diaspora. Understanding Diaspora as a process and as a condition contributes to the historicizing of the dynamic changes of this reality in different contexts, to the identification of its new forms or reconfigurations. Conceiving it, also, as a project of affinity facilitates the recognition of the new sceneries of power the communities affected are mobilizing in the memory of their deaths, and to defend their territories.

Developing an afrodiasporic decolonial critique of forced migration with these analytics moves forward the proposal of engaging in the development of a historical analysis of how territories are produced to therefore comprehend the empirical significance of Destierro as a category of analysis, social mobilization, and reparation. Hence, I post the following research question: how does the context of place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization and violence in the territories of the state of Chocó enlighten alternative ways to comprehend experiences of 'forced displacement/migration', and new cycles of Diaspora of afrodescendent populations?

### **A Working Hypothesis**

#### **A 'D-T-D<sup>2</sup>' cycle: Historicizing the massacre of Bellavista and New Afrodescendant Diasporas**

Building on this research question and on the insights presented on the description of the empirical subject my argument is that the concepts of forced migration and forced displacement are limited to explain the complexity of the world-historical realities they are expected to capture. Their analytical scope is narrow to make sense of the isolated facts and observations that were summarized on the table No 2, for the case of this monograph.

Critical sociological theory will not be possible in the absence of analytical categories capable of comprehending how and why these events are related. Less powerful are they to explain how

countries and populations with similar histories of racialization, conquest, and domination are the targets of ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of dislocation, and Diasporic Deracination. Hence, in this monograph I propose a ‘D-T-D<sup>2</sup>’ cycle as a working hypothesis. It means a ‘Diaspora-Territorialization-Destierro/Diaspora’ cycle I aim to use to chain a set of historical process in which these events could be embedded. Historicizing the massacre of Bellavista is a significant analytical tool to comprehend what could be theorized as a new cycle of Diaspora of the Afrodescendants in Colombia. If such proposal could be made it requires me to unveil how the massacre of Bellavista and the Destierro of its population appears on the history of the region.

As a consequence, I historicize the massacre of Bellavista as an event of Destierro by conceptualizing and politicizing experiences of Destierro as one of the foundations of the contemporary Afrocolombian Diaspora. Those along with a long list of violent events are opening the path towards a *new cycle of afrodescendent Diasporas*. Hence, I expect that the collected evidence could illustrate how this phenomenon ranges from the micro level of agency and interaction to the macro level of systems and social structures, from the local and regional history to the world-history, from the local time, to the world time. By doing this, I locate contemporary forms of Destierro in a chain of historical processes: Transatlantic trade, African Diaspora, Territorial Settlement in the Colombian Pacific (territorialization), XXI century Destierros, New cycle of Diaspora, New Territorial Settlements. How it occurs, and what is the socio-historical, epistemological and political importance of this process is the major task of this monograph.

The implications drawn from this study both conceptually and historically can be schematically presented as follows:

Figure 3: 'D-T-D2' cycle: A working conceptual cycle matrix

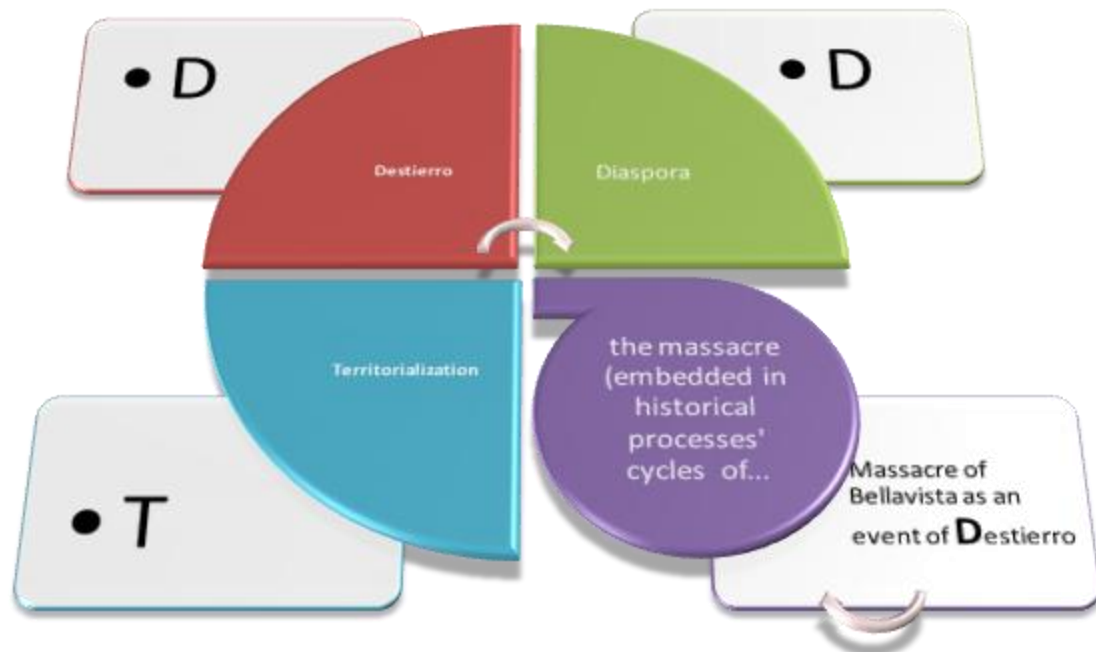
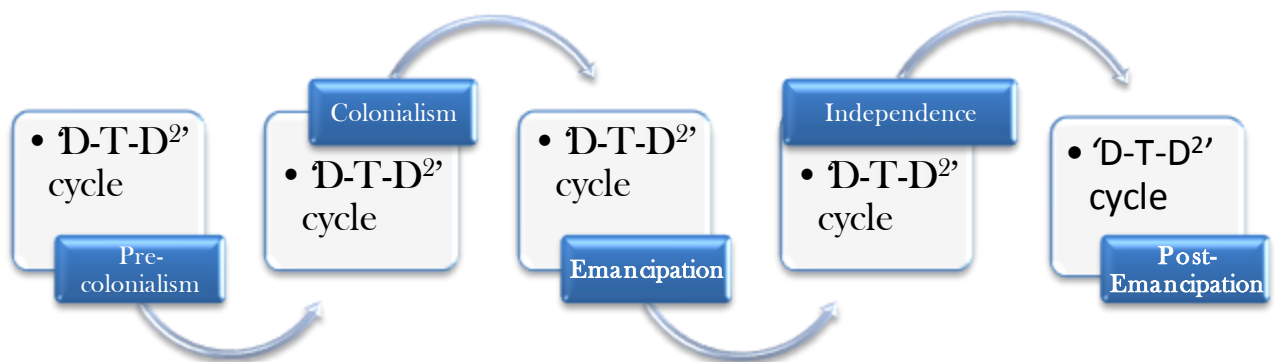


Figure 4: 'D-T-D2' cycle: a working process matrix



Fully aware that History is not a linear process, I aim to graphically represent my argument with this process matrix to suggest that in the progression moving the transitions from one moment in history to the other Destierro ( Deracination) (Diasporic Deracination) plays a central role in the socio-economic configuration of states, nations, and empires. After listening to the voices of the deracinated in chapter 2, in chapter 3 I am to explore how regions such as the Bajo Atrato River, in which Bellavista is located, appear in the geographies of capitalist exploitation in every historical period. My guiding question is how do the spaces in which land dispossession occur come into being? My working argument is that conjunctures of world-historical capitalist accumulation could be related to these processes, how? It will be my task to assess. A preliminary conceptual principle I will follow is D. Harvey's argument of accumulation by dispossession<sup>49</sup>. If dispossession is the underneath of accumulation then every moment/ cycle/ conjuncture needs to create the spaces to extract the necessary resources. D. Harvey says

“Put in language of contemporary postmodern political theory, we must say that capitalism necessarily and always creates its own ‘other’” (141)

“As in the case of labour supply, capitalism always requires a fund of assets outside of itself if it is to confront and circumvent pressures of over accumulation. If those assets, such as empty land or new raw materials sources, do not lie to hand, then capitalism must somehow produce them” (143). (Harvey, 2003)

With these elements I aim to write a critical account to the massacre of Bellavista to break the single story the concepts of forced displacement, and forced migration have allowed narrating.

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<sup>49</sup> (Marx -1867-1990 ) ( Amin, 1974 )



## CHAPTER 2

### THEY KILL US, THEREFORE WE EXIST? VOICES AND MEMORIES OF THE MASSACRE OF BELLAVISTA

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*Overview of the chapter:* This chapter describes the massacre of May 2, 2002 occurred in Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó

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This chapter has one aim: to introduce and ethnographical description of the massacre of Bellavista in the aftermaths of the event. Using 5 family interviews (condensing 14 individual voices), 45 translated songs-out of 130-, and 3 of my own journal entries of three different visits to Bellavista, I tell a collective story. Through this form I aim to raise some issues that are both in the theoretical literature, in the afrodescendent social movement, and in the everyday lives of Afrodescendent communities victims of (Destierro) Deracination.

## **Introduction**

IN CHAPTER 1 I argued that ethno-historical research fleshes out how members of social groups construct their experiences of ‘forced displacement’, question, repudiate, and explain them in the context of larger historical, political, economic, and cultural structures. I propose that building on the accounts of the victims of land dispossession, with critical ethnohistorical, and ethnosociological lenses, the researcher will be able to comprehend how the meanings of these experiences are constructed in the everyday life, and how social mobilization is crafted at the same time that violence is challenged. In this vein, dispossession and resistance to it unveil as the two opposing faces of the ethno-racial logics, projects, and logics behind the land question: the face of domination, and the face of liberation. The case of Bellavista offers a unique opportunity the historical forces, actors and factors, which established analytical frameworks have failed to fully explain towards the transformation of the societies affected.

## **The powers of the memories/narratives of resistance: An ethnographic writing strategy**

Accordingly, in this chapter I want to present an alternative ethnographical story of the massacre of Bellavista<sup>50</sup>. What for? What does this imply? How do we tell stories of land dispossession that

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<sup>50</sup> Previous accounts to this case: Lancheros, Aida Carolina y Julian Rincón (2007): “Bojayá: Entre el medio y los medios” en Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé y Luis Claudio. (edit) *Afroreparaciones: Memorias de la esclavitud y Justicia Restaurativa para Negros, Afrocolombianos y Raizales*. Bogotá. Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Gomez Nadal, Paco (2002). *Los muertos no hablan*. Bogotá. Editorial Aguilar; Grupo de Memoria Histórica de la Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación – CNRR. *Bojayá: La Guerra sin Límites*. Informe Grupo Memoria Histórica. Bogotá. Aguilar, Altea, Taurus, Alfaguara. 2010

It is important to mention that even after knowing the scope of the massacre of Bellavista, and upon the recognition of the significance of this event in the Colombian history, this thesis is the first and only socio-historical study of the case. References to the event can be found in over 100 articles about violence, social mobilizations, migration, and ethnicity in Colombia. Innumerable columns have been published in national and international newspapers. The two

capture the complex, diverse, contradictory, and contested historical forces that shape them? The concern behind these questions is the challenge I am facing to understand this case in its complexity. That is, my struggles to allow these stories revealing the inconsistencies that emerge while I am dissecting this social reality. My apprehension to narrate the contradictory, contested, and at moments obscure logics of land dispossession embedded in the voices of the survivors of the massacre of Bellavista. To that end, I borrow Tricia Rose critique of ‘story containers’<sup>51</sup> and Alfredo Molano’s writing strategy of ‘collective story’<sup>52</sup> to develop a style of storytelling that allows the stories told by the interviewed families

“not only illuminate the lives and social forces that shape them but also allow a given story’s messy seems to show, let the many life threads that run through them remain visible (Rose, 2003 ; 9)

Hence, to break the silenced layers of meaning I introduced in Chapter 1 I depart from the interviewed families’ stories. In these stories I explore how these families make sense about their own realities. Multiple realities will surface in the insights of the interviewees, particularly about the struggles to produce a collective voice to stop the abuse of different armed groups, and the state itself. Another salient dimensions are the role of women, and youth in communitarian organizations; the position of and Diocesan Afrocolombian Pastoral; the multiple effects of international aids, and the impacts of megaprojects that have come to the region, among others.

In so doing, I have preserved the stories as I heard them, in their extension, and complexity. I decided not to use fragments of the interviews to serve the purposes of my original hypothesis.

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first cited works have been written by journalists, and constitute the limited body of systematic writing to broadcast detailed insights of the event and its aftermaths. The last report has been recently published by the Group of Historical Memory of the National Commission of Reparation and reconciliation. In this report a more compelling approach has been initiated.

<sup>51</sup> Rose, Tricia. *Longing to tell. Black Women talk about sexuality and Intimacy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2003

<sup>52</sup> Molano, Alfredo. *The dispossessed. Chronicles of the Desterrados of Colombia*. Haymarket Books. 2005

Contrary, I have typed and translated their voices to learn from them. I argue that this strategy opens a rich path to learn what land dispossession means for them, how people express, and explain their condition. Thus, the powerful memories residing in these voices become the main support to raze the rationales in which legal, political, and intellectual discourses, in what today we know as forced migration is founded. In this regard, Legal Studies scholar Richard Delgado states

“stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place”<sup>53</sup>

Hence, one will be able to assess what it is that the continuities, contradictions, multiple themes, scenarios, and actors, the interviewees present in their narratives of the massacre and its aftermaths, tell us about this event, and how they relate it to larger historical, social, economic, and cultural structures. Besides, I reflect on what their stories reveal about the struggles of Afrodescendant and Indigenous social mobilization, the politics in Colombia, and their everyday lives. Social Anthropologist Marita Eastmond states the significance of narratives in forced migration research in an insightful manner. She writes

“ Stories are part of everyday life and constitute means for actors to express and negotiate experience. For researchers, they provide a site to examine the meanings people, individually or collectively, ascribe to lived experience. Narratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story. Placed in their wider socio-political and cultural contexts, stories can provide insights into how forced migrants seek to make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities, or bear witness to violence and repression. The researcher must pay particular attention to his/her own role in the production of narrative data and the representation of lived experience as text. (Eastmond 2007; 248)

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<sup>53</sup> Delgado, Richard. “Storytelling for Oppositionist and Others: A Plea for narrative”. *Michigan Law Review* 87 (1989):2411

Building on this principle, the overarching theme of the collective story, I am about to narrate, is the struggle of Black/Afrocolombian communities to survive violence, to mobilize an ethno-racial project of collective ownership of land in a context of violence, and to reconstruct life in the wings of a spirit of solidarity. My writing strategy is centered on depicting these stories as memories of resistance, as opposed to memories of victimization. In this vein I have learned from the interviewed families to historicize the powers of their memories/narratives of resistance, which have kept them alive and strong.

In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu states

“ I will simply indicate, in a more general way, it is only at the cost of veritable epistemological conversion irreducible to what phenomenology calls the *époché* that lived experience, which is in itself devoid of relevance, can enter into scientific analysis”  
( Bourdieu; 2004 ; 2)

In sum, the lived experiences captured in the stories to be presented speak about a reality with its multiple dimensions, and its contradictions. They unveil the social representations that have made their way to be considered unquestionable truths, and the new horizons for social, class, racial, and gender justice. In so doing, I dig into the epistemological contributions these stories offer to unthink and deconstruct the concept of forced migration.

## **Data and Methodology**

### **Struggles of ethnographic research in contexts of violence: Interviews and field observations**

The interviews from which I have built this collective story were open conversations discussing the biographies of the interviewees. Most stories cover a time frame between 1940s and 2010, in which 1996, 2000 and 2002 are the turning points in all stories. The last two years correspond with paramilitar, or guerillera incursions in the community.

The year 1996 marks the beginning of a cycle of violence in the region of the Bajo Atrato<sup>54</sup>. The interviews took place at secret and safe spaces for the security of both the interviewees and the interviewer. Those places were a) a room in the community parish, or in the church; b) a park very close to a group of policemen. Those spaces had to be either very visible to the police, so that they could feel they were in control of the situation, or hidden spaces in the cases of communitarian leaders whose lives are/were in jeopardy. When interviewees were elder women I will offer myself to help cooking dinner or will just have a coffee in the front of their houses to talk about life. Most interviews had the structure of a focus group. Anyone in the household would start a conversation about the situation of violence in the region and the rest of the members of the family present will integrate their thoughts.

Paramilitary and guerrillera incursions, the army's take over, massacres and massive temporary displacements of the communities have served as temporal markers in the history of these communities. As a consequence, they are present in every day conversations. From time to time I will refer to those events as an excuse to get to know how people elaborated on them, what they meant, and how they have shaped the life in the community. To create an alternative account of the massacre and for security reasons 80% of the interviewees were women between 15 and 86 years old. The men I interviewed were priests, teenagers members of the communitarian parish groups, and elder men I was entirely sure had linkages with none of the armed groups in the area. I made three visits to Bellavista with the label of a Catholic missionary (2007), as a peregrine to the commemoration of the mutilated Christ (2008), and the last one as a member of the coordinator council of the communitarian *fiestas patronales* to the Carmen Virgin (2010).

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<sup>54</sup> See annex, Map No 2

### **Ethnographies in contexts of violence: Developing a chameleonic persona**

The security restrictions limited my options to conduct an extended ethnography. To challenge these limitations I decided to develop a 'chameleonic persona' as an ethnographer. I did random visits to places, and talked to different people in the community. I talked to the policemen and of the militars that had threatened to take me to the Police Station for investigation in my third visit to the community. I figured that by doing this I could get to know their version of the situation. I will study their accounts in detailed in future projects.

During my different visits I was also accompanied- all the time- by professors, priests, and leaders of the community who made my presence less suspicious to the authorities. I am deeply thankful to the women, and men that were always with me. I don't mention their names explicitly to protect their identities. To overcome these limitations I used photography, and mass songs to capture the realities I was not allowed to record and therefore to describe in detail.

### **On the use of photography**

During my ethnography photography played a double function. First, it operated as an efficient

“...recording and storage technique that enable me to capture and collect large quantities of information in situations of social tension and temporal emergency where it was simply not possible to linger about and carry out minute observation (...) and where physical presence was always tenuous and problematic.” ( Wacquant; 2004: 400)

In the narratives below the pictures are integral part of the story. They are placed by the side of the description of the event to illustrate the space to which the narrator is referring.

Besides leaders of the community, I had two angels by my side helping me as research assistants.

They certainly did my permanence enjoyable, and kept my commitment strong.

**Figure 5: Research Assistant**





**Figure 6: Research Assistant II**



Since they are not endangered, as the adults I interviewed, I acknowledge them and introduce their pictures here. Additionally, these two pictures capture two stories I will never be able to directly photograph- even if I develop my 'chameleonic persona' to a whole different level-. In the reflection of my glasses in the first picture there is hidden the scene of five policemen taking a teenager prisoner because he was wearing a bullet as a necklace. I asked people around me what was that for, and they responded that that procedure was being applied to every new person in the community since the militants heard that the guerrilla was planning on taking over the community one more time.

In the second picture what the girl and the woman in the back are witnessing is how a couple of militants approached a group of teenagers to prohibit starting a party after the parade of the day was over<sup>55</sup>. As described in the narratives below the militarization of the life of this community is such that the inhabitants have to plan their lives according to the rule of the police and the army. This picture portrays their presence in the community.

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<sup>55</sup> My third visit to the community was during the celebrations in the name of the Virgen Del Carmen in July of 2010.

**Figure 7: Police Control in Bellavista**



Second, photography operated as a mechanism of memory keeping and making. If my thesis was going to create a narrative of resistance it should be an instrument to help building a museum in the church in which the massacre occurred. The pictures I took in my filed work will be a collection of the aftermath of the event.

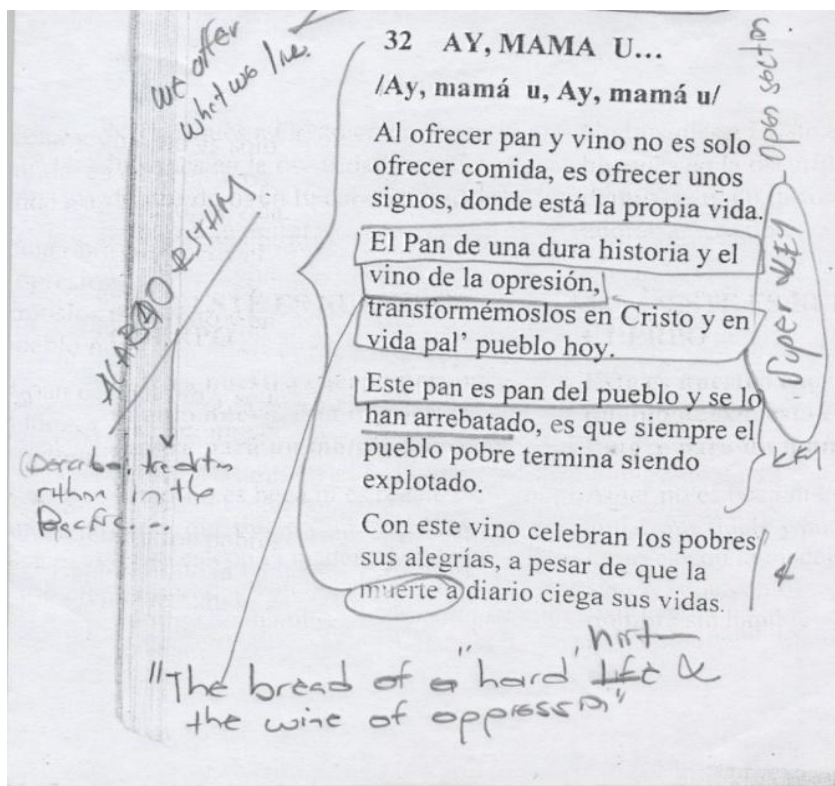
### **Parish and Family Archives: Mass Songs**

In my search for alternative sources to the families I was not able to interview I observed how there is no domination without contestation. I looked for sources that could allow me to tell a story of this community as compelling as possible. In the search I found the songs' books used in the everyday mass at the parish of Bellavista, and in the houses of the families I was hosted. After reading more than 250 lyrics I discovered that the songs' books they were using were not the traditional books I have seen and, even used in other parishes.

The songs I read were talking about offering to God the 'bread of a harsh history'- *el pan de una dura historia*- , and the 'wine of oppression'- *el vino de la oppresión*-. The songs were singing and asking

God for Autonomy, and Self-determination. There were other key words such as Black People's Liberation, Black Bible, Marginalization, Silenced History, Hope, Transformation, Justice, Liberty, and Managing the Land of the community. I understood that in the songs they were using in the mass was captured the voice of a community organized to defend their lives and their territory. I realized I could rely on this source as much as I was doing with the interviews. These songs were collectively written by the women on the parish group. These women are housewives, nurses, school teachers, lawyers, accounts, dentists, among others. They meet weekly to read the Bible, to discuss the needs of the community, to prepare masses, and write songs according to the occasion.

**Figure 8: Image of Mass Song**



This is an image of one of my ethnographic fieldnotes in the song's lyrics. In this vein, based on the interviews, and songs I tell this story and I reflect on the politics of AfroDiasporic Spirituality and Spirituality as politics of AfroDiasporic Decolonialization.

With these tools I aim to take the reader to a place she/he may never visit or imagine, but that she/he will know and comprehend in its complexity. This is my aspiration, and duty, this is my epistemology of liberation.

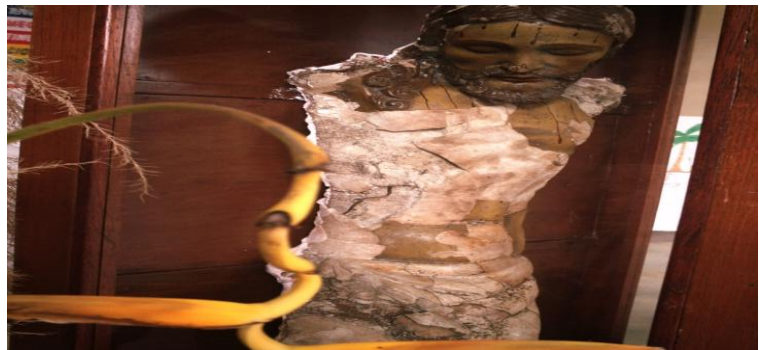
### **Ripped from the land**

#### **The Massacre of Bellavista**

#### **Maria II and Family**

*Mija*- Little daughter- I was right there where the pipe exploited. It was the morning of May 2, 2002.

**Figure 9: Mutilated Christ of Bojayá**



How could we forget that day? I was below the Christ all the time. I wanted him to protect me and my little baby. There was no place safer than my spot. But I moved because my older daughter, who was pregnant at the time, needed me to help her with her older son. I swear that a minute after I moved to help her, the cylinder broke into the church and exploited right there. Look how the Christ was left. I



would have never survived, but I did<sup>56</sup>. I guess God has a mission for me, but one never knows. They can come back at any moment and kill us all. If it is not them, is the state, of the paramilitares, they are all the same, at the end.

It all started in the year 2000. At the time the guerrilla had invaded the community; they took over the police station, the Banco Agrario, and the community. They didn't kill of the policemen here because the guerrilleros took all the arms while the policemen were sleeping, but they did killed everybody in the Vigia del Fuerte's police station-except for one that runaway- 25 policemen the FARC massacred - they were the kings in the community ever after. I will be as far to say that that was when the armed conflict started here.

**Figure 10: Destroyed Police Station I**



**Figure 11: Destroyed Police Station II**

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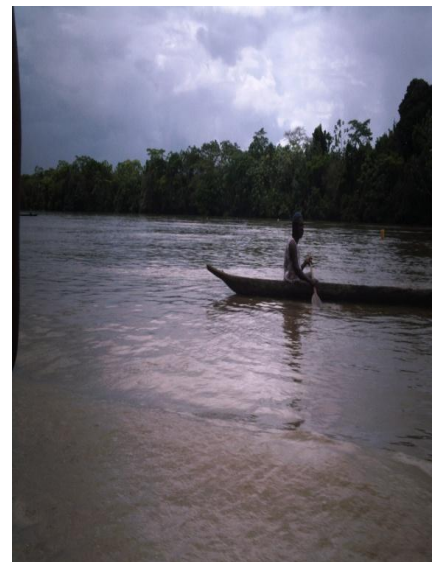
<sup>56</sup> Figure 9: Image of the Mutilated Christ of Bojayá, May 2, 2008. A symbol of resistance to rebuild life in the New Bellavista

**Figure 12: - Woman navigating the Atrato River**

**Figure 13: Aerial picture of New Bellavista- and Old Bellavista-Bojayá, Acción Social**

They were the owners of all this land – *llano*-, you could see them in the streets as if they were the army or the police. They used to go to the houses and knock “*tun, tun*” –*nack, nack*- : “ *we are inviting you all to a meeting in the community stadium, nobody can miss it, not even the smallest one, you know who will happen to whomever does not show up*”. At the time, we-the women- used to meet at someone’s house around 3:00 pm to play *bingo*, and they will say to us “*stop that bingo, don’t you know it is an emergency? We need you to listen to what we have to say in the meeting*”. They said in the meetings that they will defend us. They defended us that much that they ended up killing almost everybody! Since then we have been suffering the war. Since 2000 they have been the kings in this Atrato<sup>57</sup>.

At the end of April of 2002 the paramilitares invaded Bellavista Viejo, and because the guerrilleros were the owners of the territory they didn’t like it. The paramilitares entered eight days before the massacre. It was a Sunday, we were coming out of the mass, and we saw two boys that came running desperate, I recognized my nephew running through the bridge –*que se la embalaba*. “*Que paso, Que paso*”- what happened,



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<sup>57</sup> Photo No: 6. Aerial picture of New Bellavista- and Old Bellavista-Bojayá, Acción Social

what happened- we asked-, they looked terrified. *Se nos metieron!*- they have entered! -They said. They also mentioned that the paramilitares that came in the boats were not few, they said they were a whole uniformed town – *viene todo un pueblo, un poco de uniformados*-

They arrived to the riverside and there was a guerrillero without uniform taking a shower in the river. They talked to him and asked him where the guerrilla was living. The guerrillero told them that the guerrilla lived in the community in front- in Vigia del Fuerte-. So the paramilitares were here and immediately crossed to Vigía. He sent them there. While the paramilitares were crossing, the guerrillero took an Indian and forced him to take him in a *champa* to Murri<sup>58</sup>. He sent them there so that he had enough time to runaway.

Eight to ten days passed since this encounter. People started getting nervous and decided to leave to Quibdó or to nearby communities. We all knew things were not *sabrosas*-good- here. The guerrilla also runaway so at the very beginning there was not a combat. People started getting sick with nervous breakdowns when the paramilitares took possession of Bellavista. Father Antun- the priest of the community parish- had left to Quibdó to bring food to supply the community store. Two days later, when he was coming back, in Tagachi, the guerrilla stopped him and confiscated all the food he brought. They also told him to go back to Quibdó because they were going to *act* in Bellavista. “*But people may need my help*” the priest said. The guerrilleros responded: “it is your responsibility if you continue from this point”, and he came back. When the father got here he didn’t say that the guerrilla *se iba a meter*- was going to take over-. He went straight to the major, and the director of the school, and asked to suspend the classes. He didn’t say why, just that it was better if classes were suspended.

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<sup>58</sup> Photo No: 7 - Woman navigating the Atrato River



Because there were no classes the professors that were not from here traveled to Quibdó; I sent my nephew to La Loma, I was raising another girl that I sent along with my grandmother to Arenal. I stayed here with my son, my daughter, and my grandsons. I sent them away on Wednesday morning. In the afternoon Bellavista was full of paramilitares. There was another contingent of boats that had entered to Murri with other paramilitares that had not come out; we knew that that was a war sign.

They started to make *retenes* –illegal retentions- at different points in the course of the river so people was not able to see how they were grouping. The first of May at 6:00 am *se formó la arrechera aquí*- everything started-. People were still sleeping when the shots started to fly. People thought that it was in there dreams. My daughter told me “*mom I heard something, was I dreaming?*” She woke up right away and looked through the door.

**Figure 14: Last House Standing at the Old Bellavista**



She told me “ *the door is open, and the door is closed*”. That is a contradiction isn’t it? something was really wrong, I thought. Seconds after she said that I heard “*the nurse, the nurse*”, the paramilitares were screaming and jelling; their commandant was deadly shut – *le habian dado al comandante*-.

What happened was that in April 30 when the Father organized the meeting to suspend the classes, he also organized a meeting with the leaders of the community and the paramilitares. He was telling them that it was not good that they were landing on the community. In the middle of the meeting the commandant of the paramilitares received a call. It looks like from an airplane a paramilitar saw how the guerrilla was arriving to Bellavista, and told the commandant that they were a lot. So the commandant suspended the meeting without an explanation, and around six in the evening gave the order to all his people to leave Bellavista and cross over to Vigía.

**Figure 15: Aerial picture of New Bellavista- and Old Bellavista-Bojayá II, Acción Social**



There were two *paracos* –paramilitars- that stayed in Bellavista trying to escape, and at six in the morning of May 1 *una panga*- a boat- crossed to get them. When they were crossing back the combat started. The first shut was for the commandant- *y le bajaron al comandante*. So when I heard “*the nurse, the nurse*” was when the paramilitares where trying to save their commandant. When they passed by my house I saw when they were taking him to the hospital. It was like if they were carrying a pig. Then was when I realized the seriousness of the situation, and my daughter’s contradictory statement.

*Y de verdad se formo la arrechera que Jesús creo en Dios Padre*- And the combat started for real. People started to come to my house because it was close to the *caño* – channel of the river- were they could hide more easily.

**Figure 16: Overview of the path to the 'Caño' I**



**Figure 17: Destroyed Structure of the Bridge over the 'Caño'**





Around eight or nine the Father invited us to come to Church. It was made out of concrete and we could be protected.

**Figure 18: Reconstructed Catholic Church of Bellavista –Outside**



**Figure 19: Reconstructed Catholic Church of Bellavista-Inside**



The Father said that we should come to the Church because the combat was really serious, and that we will be all together supporting each other. Imagine hundreds of us in there from May 1 in the morning; we also spent the night there. In the morning of May 2 *-pan y aguapanela-* bread and a warm beverage called *aguapanela-* was distributed. Someone took the risk of getting out while the combat was ongoing, and brought a big stove for us to cook rice. It was a living nightmare. Gun shots from one side to the other, pipes sent, screams, when...BOOM!... one pipe cross the ceiling and destroyed everything it reached. I don't know how more people didn't die. That pipe fell down, and exploited. The pipe we were using to cook was in use. The pipe the guerrilla sent exploded right in the middle of the Church. It was sent from the neighborhood Pueblo Nuevo in a direction that the guerrilla could killed the paramilitares that were hidden next to us by the Nun's House.

**Figure 20: Nun's House**





**Figure 21: Reconstructed Catholic Church of Bellavista and Nun's House**



The guerrilleros have already sent various pipes that had failed to explode; the one that exploded was the one that fell into the Church where most of the women and children were seated. That was why mostly women and children died out of the 119 casualties of the massacre. Those who made it alive but were hurt by the *esquirlas*-little pieces of the pipe- will die in the years to come of different kinds of cancer.

After the pipe exploded I was *aturdida*- dazed - I was seeing through the door of the *Casa cural*-rectory/ priest's house-because my daughter had called me. The Father was wounded by a glass and was *aturdido*- dazed - as well. People ran afterwards. Those that were alive started to scream, to cry, to run, some of them die while trying to escape the pain that was invading their bodies. A man with no head ran for seconds until he finally fell. A woman that was crazy for years started putting together the pieces of heads, legs, and arms that she found to put people back together, which was just inhumanly

horrible. Why would something like this happen to us? What do they want from us? Why God? What have we done to deserve this? How long will you keep us seen our people dying? We have suffered enough- *nosotros hemos pasado mucho trabajo-*

All these questions crossed my mind while witnessing so much horror. Will we survive? I thought we will not.

### **Shipped away**

I was hypnotized by seeing so much people dead, Ba!- I said people- it was pieces of human remains-

**Figure 22: Woman Observing the Destroyed Church**



*pedazos de carne mija-*. Then my daughter said “mom are we going to stay here?”

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<sup>59</sup> Figure 22- [www.witnessforpeace.org/article.php?id=208](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/article.php?id=208)

We were the only ones that were at the Church after that. We ran to the Nun's House. My little son almost drowned because the river was flooded.

**Figure 23: Old Bellavista Flooded**



My little son- who was three months old- fell off my hands in the water. My God! I looked desperately but I could not find him. People passed by my side running, nobody cared, but I don't blame them. We were all trying to save our lives. I could not manage to hold my grandson, my daughter with her baby, and the one that just had fallen off. I was desperate and running out of time. Where in that flooded river was my little soon? Suddenly, someone stopped and helped me. That was a miracle. Nothing else can explain how we survived.

In our desperate escape we all got to a point in the community where all the survivors were safe for a moment. The Father and other leaders said that we had to get out of the community because the combat was turning to worse. Some people went to the forest; others went to the *caño*-channel of the river- to reach the communities of the Bojayá River. Josefa, Teo, and the women of the Church started



organizing people in groups to cross over to Vigía. We knew that crossing was risky but we had no other option. These women didn't think about themselves, they wanted everyone to make it to – *el otro lado*- the other side alive. They gum shuts were flying, and they were putting pieces of wood together to make a big *balsa*, and get people out. They were the last who left the riverside.

*Nos montamos en ese bote*-we all got into that improvised boat-*sin canaleta ni na'* - with no paddle - The teenagers started moving the boat with their hands, and others were in the river hanging by the side, while swimming to cross the river. While we were struggling to cross we were screaming “ *Somo civiles, Somo civiles*”- “we are civilians, we are civilians”. We screamed it from the bottom of our hearts to reach the *orilla* –riverside- of Vigía.

### **“María I & Family”**

I was leaving the tragedy from Bogotá, and I will take the narration from here. I am not from Bellavista; I am from the Alto Bojayá. I am a 42 years old housewife who migrated to Bellavista when I was eight. All the Bojayaseños were dying no matter where we were. I was watching the news seeing the faces of the people I knew. My mother, my six children, and siblings were in Bellavista. They all run to the Church except my mother who was sick, and stayed at home.

While in Bogotá, I called, and called my siblings in Quibdó and they responded crying with no stop. As the media was allowed to enter to Bellavista in the news I started seeing –*todo mi personal*- all my people. I was counting that's so and so- *ese es julano, sutano, mengano*- The morning after the explosion- May 3, 2002- while my family was trying to escape the atrocity occurred at the of the community church members of the paramilitary group were *husmeando* – sniffing-in the kitchens of the empty town to see what they could eat. In one of the houses they found my mother an elder woman trying to get out of the underneath of her bed. They asked her:

P: *“And you little grandmother stayed here?”*

She responded:

Miii: *“I could not run. I said... If I have to die here, then, I will have to. That will be up to you...if you want to kill me, then go ahead and kill me because I could not run. If I have to die here what else can I do?”...*

Then they asked her:

P: *“Do you have anything to eat around here? We are hungry can you give us something to eat?”*

She responded:

Miii: *“Go ahead look around and eat whatever you find”*

At this moment that I am telling you, everybody had run away to Vigía del Fuerte. I am not exaggerating, the only one who was left behind was my mother. Everybody was afraid- *toda esa muertesiña*- all that death that was left in the Church- *Ay hombre por Dios*- Oh My God!

My younger brother- *el que mata guagua* – the one who hunts *guagua* - asked the guerrilleros to let him cross to Bellavista to look for my mother. They didn't allow people to go back. And because at the time it was Ms. Guerrilla Law- *la ley era Doña Guerrilla*- they were the ones with the authority both here in Bellavista and in Vigía. After three days –*con sus noches*- with nights included of begging them to please let my brother to go find my mother they say: *“vaya pero no se demore”- go but don't take too long, you have no right to take anything more, either alive or dead just bring her*”.

Because three days had passed, and mom was sick, people had the coffin ready to give her a descent sepulture.

My brother went and while arriving he called *“ Vieja Maria” “ Vieja Maria”*, and as weak as she was she responded. Oh God! My brother said *“ mom is alive”* He brought her back. That was a small joy

in the middle of so much suffering. I didn't expect my mother to make it alive to other encounter with those men. She has an angel for that. The first time she saw them was when she and most women stop working in the *monte*- farms. She will tell what happened.

### **“ Maria III”**

*Vea-* look- Now what is killing us is the armed conflict, since all the illegal armed groups are around this has change. I am old, don't remember how old. I use to go fishing to the *ciénaga*-swamp- I left at the hour I wanted, I came back went I wanted as well. Since these people entered here they have been *—disque determinando los horarios* - determining the time- After 6:00pm nobody leaves or enters Bellavista. If something moves in the river the Police puts out all the lights to see if it is guerrilla. With that the ones who lose the most is us *los campesinos*- the pesants. *Uno-* one- can't do the labor we need to do to feed our houses.

*Yo pues-* I will never go back to that farm. One day before - *el 2 de mayo-* the massacre of May 2, 2002, I was coming back from my farm up here by the Bojayá River. My *champa* was full of plantains, *yuca*, *Borojó*, *caña* y unos *animalitos*- and little animals I had hunted. *Yo iba solita con Dios y la Virgen* – I was alone with God and the Virgin- I was eating a *caña* because I was hungry- *sabrosa yo-* I was enjoying myself. All off at sudden, I looked to the riverside, by the farm of *Las Tierras del Señor Eleodoro*- the land of Mr. Eleodoro, and *eso no era si no hombres!*, that was full of men!- *en todo ese monte, escondido ahi-* in all that jungle they were hidden there-. I stopped my eating and moved faster to reach home. I had not come back since then- *toy pa decirle unos 10 años-* I am about to say like 10 years ago -1998-. This violence has underdeveloped us so much- *esta violencia nos ha atrasado mucho.*

## **Maria II and family (continued)**

Just as no government authority said a word about what was happening in the Atrato, nobody attended the alerts we, with the people of the Dioceses, sent adverting that something like this could happen. It was a matter of time.

## **Hidden in plain light**

Nobody knew what was happening to us here, nobody cared. I think the first person from outside Bellavista and Vigía who knew about the massacre was my mother. She was in Cali, and for two days she said, she was calling to the public Compartel phone because she lost contact with me. She said that one of her calls went through, and was a *paraco* – paramilitar-who answered. She said “*alo*” and *disque el paramilitar le dijo* – the paramilitar told her – *que alo ni que nada, digale a la Cruz Roja que la Guerrilla tiró una pipa y mató un poco de gente*- “what alo tell the Red Cruz that the guerrilla threw a pipe and killed a lot of people in the Church”.

She was going to day standing- she told me- She knew I am all about the church activities and she thought – *ahí cayó mi hija*- my daughter died there-, and the news spread. When –*esto se ajustó*- the combat got worst the communication was cut off. Everybody –*se agosimpó*- conveyed in Quibdó trying to know what happened down here- *acá abajó*-. Nobody was moving here, people were trapped. There were no more airplanes coming in, not even to take the wounded to Medellín.

Those who didn't die in the Church died waiting to be taken care of, and the rest of us have been dying slowly from one thing or the other afterwards...

When the militars came to take over, God! – *Jesús por Dios*- It would have been better if they never showed up. Helicopters started to arrive, and they were supposed to take the wounded either to Quibdó or to Medellín, but *ve!* they started to take their own people- the paramilitars- While we were

trying to find a safe place in Vigía, the paramilitars robbed our houses, they took our clothing, dressed up, and were taken out as “civilians”. They were not hurt- *taban enteros*- but the military flew them away from the scene. The military knew there was no Bellavisteano they were *montando* – taking- to their helicopters.

When the military came the harm was already done and they came to make it worse. Journalists came along with them, and then was when we became the show of the moment. The show of the man with no head was spread around the world in minutes. The general crying with the shoe of a little boy; a drunken president promising to reconstruct Bellavista in few months. It was all about them, the politicians. While they were mobilizing their agendas in the media we were trying to escape such horror, and find a safe place. But where will that place be? If our biggest enemy, the fear, was in our bodies, the pain, the horror, our loved ones we could not bury.

None of us was taken in the fast boats of the military, no helicopter came to take us out. We had to find among ourselves the means to get to Quibdó, or the communities in the Bojayá River. Nobody came for us because we have always been nobodies, and after the massacre we became displaced. We were that much of a displaced that I just carried my dirty clothes in a plastic black bag because someone gave old clothes in Vigía. A plastic bag! A plastic black bag is for the eggs, for the rice, it is not for my things, not for me!

This was just the beginning of all our humiliations. In Quibdó, some of us went to the houses of our relatives; others were allocated in the coliseum. The agents of *Acción Social* registered us, and gave us bags with food. We were not supposed to be in this situation when we have all our things in Bellavista. They made us go from one side to the other in Quibdó to get that little bag with rice and grains, which was their idea of food to feed a family, which was humiliating. I am telling you, I am a

school teacher, with family in Quibdó, and a family, and I am no displaced, but the people who had nothing?

It was a matter of a couple of months we said: “we need to go back, no matter to what cost”.

Everyone has something to say. Some have more to tell than others- *siga ud mijo*- You go next little son.

### **“George and Family”**

We are originally from Apartadó. We came to Bellavista displaced from our farm. When the massacre occurred we were already displaced. After that we were kind of a- *doble desplazados*- double-displaced. My brother was the guerrillero who sent the paramilitars to Vigía. He joined the guerrilla after the paramilitars killed the peasants in my village, and forced us off our property at Apartadó- Antioquia-. We have been ripped from our land, shipped away, and it has been really difficult to have a new life. I was eighteen years old in 2002. Do you remember that there was a woman who gave birth in the Church because she was too nervous, and who died instantly- with the baby after- the exploitation? That was my woman and my child. How can one possibly recover from that?

*Toy pa’ decirle*- I am about to tell a displaced, a *desterrado*, a *desarraigado*- *un desplazado*, *un desterrado*, *un desarraigado*- all of that, and none of the above at the same time. That is me. What can we use that for if at the end nobody likes us, or cares about us? My family is pretty much falling apart. We made it alive, but we all have our own traumas. If someone is to tell my story is to get people to know that I am a human being, I also have feelings. I really don’t know why this happened to us. Is it because we are Blacks? – But the priest who died was White, never mind-*ohvidelo*- I don’t know.

Now these politicians come with their speeches saying they will save us, but they are messing around with us. After our people got killed, everybody had money to give us- *eso to' el mundo-*; here the president came to build a new town that was pretty much an imposition because they said we know nothing, and they are the ones with the knowledge. The few things that we are comfortable with were after long battles, and exhausting meetings.

### **...and reborn**

#### **“Josefa and Family”**

It was May 1 of 2002, my father said: ‘we are not going to the Church. There are too many people in there already’. I was afraid. Our house is made out of wood, and the Church out of concrete. There was no chance we will survive. I had already lived the take over – *la toma-* of 2000. I knew I will not survive another. In this story you will know me as Josefa, and my family, as that, just, my family. It is better to keep it like this. You have seen pieces of my life in the accounts of my sisters, and brother. I would like to remember the day we came back to the Old Bellavista.

**Figure 24: Main Street of the Old Bellavista**



In memory of the massacre we wrote several songs, here are some excerpts:

*\* No vamos a llorar por lo que ya pasó,  
Vamos a construir una mañana mejor. Es  
tiempo de ayudar, de sembrar con fe y amor,  
una sonrisa, una esperanza y una flor.*

*We will not cry for what has already  
happened, we will build together a better  
future. It is time to help, to plant with faith  
and love, a smile, hope, and a flower.*

*\*\* El pueblo negro no aguanta Más miseria  
y opresión Como el pueblo de Israel  
Acompáñanos Señor*

*The Black people can't stand more misery  
and oppression. Like with the Israeli people,  
be with us God.*

*El pueblo Afroatrateño, canta a Dios esta  
canción encomendando sus sueños por un  
futuro mejor*

*The Afro-Atrateña people sing to God this  
song offering our dreams for a better future*

We could not live with all that *desprecio as desplazados*-contempt as displaced-. We were not in our land. As people, as a community, as a family we organized to come back to Bellavista. With this action we became the first community that had returned to its land in Colombia. A community as organized and fighting as our Bellavista could not long endure the torture to which we were being forced so we mobilize all the necessary means to return home. Despite being refugees in various places around the city, the facilities of the ACIA – Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato- Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato- served as a meeting point to bring forward the strategy of resistance to the death, hunger and desolation, which in those days were up and down in the Atrato, and still are. In the facilities of the ACIA we listened to each other's complaints and concluded that what was left to us was the return. The brothers and sisters of ACIA support and helped us writing a statement of appeal.



There were no conditions to return, even though it was one of the requirements posed by the policy of assistance to the displaced. After several meetings and after the creation of a list of demands, with the support of members of Community Councils in the area, pastoral agents of the Diocese, and some sympathetic to the cause we conveyed to return to the 1 of September of 2002.

The military was established in Bellavista supposedly to quell the illegal armed groups, and to protect the community. When we announced that we were coming back to Bellavista, we received information that everything was ready, that the combats had stopped, and that the town was cleaned, and with power to facilitate our arrival and installation; ready for us to start over. What was not said was that the concept of conditions they had was entirely different from ours. The power they were talking about was a set of torches in the entrance to the town. They also said they had supposedly cleaned, and swept the houses. They lied to us. We arrived in the evening; there was no peaceful return, as we were promised. Even though there was no combat, the soldiers welcomed us with a tuft of mosquitoes that were going to kill us all. There was no power, no food. The houses were robbed, and dirty. The people of Bellavista have suffered enough.

Upon this traumatic installation, we cleaned the community, while remembering what had happened. To accompany the souls of our family members we celebrated a ceremony to illuminate their path to heaven. After our accommodation we started a whole new process. Different institutions around the world started offering money to help us reconstructing our lives. The international funding that was not managed by the community itself. Agents of the Uribe's

government were sent to start the construction of a new Bellavista. We wanted the funds to be invested where the Old Bellavista is located but they said that money was not going to be invested in that piece of land easily floodable by the Atrato.

The problem was not the land itself. The Atrato River has been flooding more than ever because

t is full of garbage in the *desembocadura*- end of the river - to the ocean. If they do their job and clean the river it will not flood as much. They didn't listen to what we had to say. Everything was imposed. We struggled to negotiate minimum conditions but the final design of the town was theirs. The COCOMACIA donated the land in which the New Bellavista I located now. The president Uribe called it "The City of the Jungle". They said, they wanted to give us a taste of development, and by doing so they ended up deepening our anguish. Most of the houses were never completed; their design broke apart everything that we are. The kitchens are so small, like the city kitchens. We no longer have a space to seat around and talk while cooking. The river is now so far away that we can't reach easily the man sealing the plantains or basic food supplies.

**Figure 25: Cows on the Old Bellavista territory**



Everything became more expensive. There are fewer jobs, and more people depending on aids. The electricity is worst that ever, and the water is as dark and dirty as the river when is flooded. They took us out of our old Bellavista with the argument that it was easily floodable. After getting the new house in the New Bellavista they made us renounce to the properties we had on the Old Bellavista. We could no longer even visit, or keep our houses

as the memory of our history. What for? –*Los Duros*- the men with the money are taking that land over. First it was the army seated there, and nobody was allowed to pass by. Now, there are cows being feed there. If you ask who are the owners of the cows you will see why they took as out from there.

**Figure 26: Man Observing the Desolated Old Bellavista**



We have been resisting and demonstrating our presence in the Old Bellavista. We have placed marks in the land, and the owners of the cows will take them off. We are now planning on building a community museum in the reconstructed Church to tell the world our story. If we don't have a presence in our land what history are we going to tell? What is going to be written about us? What are the massacred Bellavista people the world will see? In the memory of our *muertos* -dead- we find the strength to survive.

*El recuerdo de nuestros muertos fortalece nuestra historia/ con la convicción de negro siguen en nuestra memoria.*

*El regreso a nuestra tierra fortalece la esperanza como raza que se une nuestro canto es una danza*

*Hermanos no permitamos que otro venga a decidir con la mano en nuestro pecho empecemos a sugerir.*

*Esta tierra es nuestra vida y nos la están maltratando pero el pueblo negro sigue en su lucha sin descanso*

*En esta comunidad de tantas personas lindas, pedimos al Dios del cielo que vivamos con Justicia*

*The memory of our dead strengthens our history with the conviction as Black People they remain  
in our memory*

*The return to our land strengthens the hope as a united race, our song is a dance*

*Brothers and Sisters let's don't allow others to come and decide for us, with the hand in our  
hearts, let's start making decisions in our own*

*This land is our life, and others are mistreating it. But the Black People continue their struggle  
with no rest*

*This community of so many beautiful people asks God in heaven to give us a life in justice.*

*They exploit us, they erase us from history*

*They kill us, therefore we exist*

*We resist, we liberate our lives and lands, and therefore we reinvent our existence*

Hence, what lessons can we derive from these stories? In chapter 3 I discuss the lessons of this case to develop a research agenda from an Afrodiasporic Decolonial critique of Forced Migration.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESTIERRO AND DIASPORA AS CATEGORIES OF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS, SOCIAL MOBILIZATION, AND REPARATION

#### **Introduction**

*To what extent can the concept of forced migration capture, and comprehend the previous stories? How can we conceptualize Destierro/Deracination and Diaspora as categories of analysis, social mobilization, and reparation to overcome the limitations of the forced migration framework? What do we need this for?*

In this chapter I deploy the theoretical, and historical grounds in which my concepts and working hypothesis have been shaped. At the end of chapter 1 I stated that Territories are socio-geo-historical formations that must be understood within the context in which they are conceived, produced, lived, re-produced, and unproduced. So are the experiences of land dispossession. The notions used to theorize this processes must consider local meanings of land and territory. If we are to comprehend more fully the stories of the families presented in chapter 2, we must also know the history of their territories, the competing logics behind their land struggles, and their legacies.

The lives and struggles to survive of each of these families are shaped by the legacies of slavery, and the colonial foundation of the power, which reconfigure in every historical period to dispossess the population that resides in the land they have worked, fought, and produced. This means a history of a racialized and gendered labor exploitation.

This require us then to unpack the colonial, modern, racial, sexual, patriarchal, and capitalist historical forces that shape the process of land dispossession of the community of Bellavista, and communities in the Atrato River. In the narratives previously presented there are two major issues I would like to emphasize: the competing logics of the meaning of the land- for capitalist exploitation vs. as an integral part of the community life-, and the multiple actors and processes of the current armed conflict in Colombia. We saw how the interviewees attributed responsibility to one armed group or the other, but this is a phenomenon that goes beyond this depiction.

In this chapter I develop the argument that historical analysis as an analytic to unthink/deconstruct the notion and field of Forced Migration implies that scholars will have to historicize processes of territorialization, land tenure, and land acquisition to comprehend what the violent uprooting of a population means in the long *durée* of the life of the population studied or labeled under a certain category. That is, I would argue that to make a more encompassing claim about the importance of historicizing land dispossession, ‘race’, racism, patriarchy, labor exploitation, and region making are as central as conflict, development projects, and disasters, which have been established as the main factors inducing forced migration.

The concepts of Destierro and Diaspora offer these analytics. To develop this argument this chapter has four parts. In the first, I introduce Destierro as Diaspora as concepts and methods; as categories of historical *analysis*, social mobilization, and their power as legal categories for reparation. Second, I reflect on the stories of Chapter 2 to assess how resisting Destierro the community of Bellavista deny the displaced status. I discuss the major effects of this phenomenon. Third, I move towards the development of a research design building on these



analytics. I develop the three components of socio-historical analysis of my conception of Destierro: power, knowledge, and liberation. And the four dimensions underneath them: history and representation, memory, and mobilization. And conclude my attempt to demonstrate the limitations of the framework of forced migration developing the notion of world-historical emptied-spaces. I propose a historiography on the forms of land acquisition, and land tenure in the Bajo Atrato Region as an strategy to comprehend the meaning of collectives territories, and the power of what these communities call ancestrality. I describe this conception of territory in comparison to a historical revision of how spaces in which Destierro occurs are constructed discursively. Building on Arturo Escobar notion of ‘Developmentaizable spaces’ I describe how the same territories are portrayed as spaces for exploitation. Hence, I confront these two competing logics to conclude my narrative on how the context of place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization and violence in the territories of the state of Chocó enlighten alternative ways to comprehend experiences of ‘forced displacement/migration’, and new cycles of Diaspora of Afrodescendent and Indigenous populations in the world system.

### **Destierro and Diaspora as Concepts and Methods**

How does each of them capture new realities? How do they capture new global realities or designate old phenomena in a new way? As stated in chapter 1 the concept of Diaspora, and Destierro allow us to capture historically and geographically specific processes of land dispossession from a world-historical decolonial perspective. In this sense I propose the concept of Destierro as a category to articulate how local conceptions of territory are constructed historically, and the impact of being dispossessed from it, and connect it to similar experiences in the world system through the rationales of the concept of Diaspora. Applying a ‘D-T-D<sup>2</sup>’ cycle - Diaspora-Territorialization-Destierro/Diaspora- these two notions surface as significant

analytical tools to comprehend: first, a history of territorial settlement as all human beings; second, a experience of Destierro/Deracination/Uprooting; third, a process of dispersion, an a condition of dislocation; four, a politicization of the condition of Diaspora as a project of affinity, and the re-start to the cycle through the creation of new territorial settlements; new experiences of Destierro/Deracination/Uprooting, and so forth.

As proposed by A. Lao-Montes the African Diaspora is a multicentered historical field framed by a world-historical process of domination, exploitation, resistance and emancipation. I argue that processes of Destierro are an integral part of the axis framing this field. Building on S. Arboleda's conception, and developing it I will propose the concept of Destierro as a category of historical analysis, as a method, and as the foundation to generate the main claims that structure Diaspora as a project of affinity (Lao-Montes; 2007:310).

In this vein the concept of Destierro subsumes the following:

- Destierro as one of the foundations of the a contemporary moment of the Afrodescendent, Indigenous, Mestizo Diasporas; the historical formations of the relations of domination based on the marginalization/isolation of the other(s).
- The historical process by which racial, sexual, class, gender, and spatial categories condense to produce a marginalized other. This naturalizes the condition of who deserves to live and who deserves to die; as a process of allocation of "targets" in cultures, bodies and territories.
- Destierro it can be conceived as a social relation of domination, as a mechanism, as well as a complex of social relationships that are the foundations of historical institutions trans-historically, and trans-locally founding and maintaining imperial formations, and modern nation-states.

- Destierro as violence is constitutive of the modernity/coloniality. It is a foundational political epistemic category constitutive of the diasporas, exiles, holocausts, ethnic cleansing, and genocide different societies have known through their histories.

### **Resisting Destierro Denying the Displaced Status**

Thus viewed, I set the rationales for an analytical framework to study processes of Destierro and Diaspora reflecting on the unanswered questions of the current literature of forced displacement and forced migration(Chapter 1) and the lessons learned from the experience of Bellavista(Chapter 2). The basic epistemological assumption of this framework is rooted in the significance of locating an act of violence, such as the one occurred in Bellavista, in a larger and longer conceptual, and socio-historical formation, in a broader spatial configuration, and in a more complex structure of social systems.

Put differently, with this framework I attempt to historicize Destierro by conceptualizing and politicizing these experiences as one of the foundations of the Afrocolombian Diaspora. Hence, I propose to place Destierro in the timespace realities in which it occurs. In so doing, it requires us to consider multiple social, geographical and historical dimensions. It means, to disentangle the spatial, racial, gender, and class logics of Destierro: how it impacts women, afrodescendent and indigenous populations; the local, the regional, the national, and the global context in which the history of this community has been developed; the impact of racism, sexism, patriarchy, and imperialism.

The narratives of massacre of Bellavista raise challenging questions. The history of the state of Chocó has been marked by the systematic killing of its population and the appropriation of the

land and natural resources. Therefore, a sociohistorical account to the massacre of Bellavista can't overlook that history. Describing the collective actions undertaken by the inhabitants of the community of Bellavista-Bojayá has a particular importance: a) in this community took place one of the most tragic massacres of the beginning of the XXI century in the Americas; b) the output of this event forced all its residents to acquire the status of “displaced” people; c) after the staying in Quibdó<sup>60</sup> of most of the population, for about four months, Bellavista is one of the few communities that have had a satisfactory return to their land; and d) five years after their return, the project of resettlement of this population ended in the construction of the New Bellavista<sup>61</sup>. This event has radically transformed the life of this community, its everyday use of the territory and the distribution of the population in the space.

In the case of the massacre of Bellavista we can see how processes of Destierro imply profound changes in the societies that suffer it. Like disappearance/decrease of the population, the destruction of communities, as well as the relationships built with their territories. The effects of the Destierro may become irreversible and irreparable in the subjective, in the cultural, economical and political. These changes could be seen in the negative transformation of the territorial configuration of rural communities.

On the other hand, living through Destierro strengthens the social mobilization of the Afrocolombian, and Indigenous populations. Hence, considering that the territory is an element that has been built, fought and politicized, the problem of Destierro involves a deterioration of the social condition of the subjects that are abruptly removed from their territories. This

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<sup>60</sup> The capital city of the state of Chocó

<sup>61</sup> Named disrespectfully by the president “a city on the jungle”

description of the experience of Bellavista allows us to see some of the features of this phenomenon, and the role of women in the creation of strategies to survive the act of violence and to rebuild the community.

Now, how could we move the lessons of this case forward? How could we move from discussing the impact on Destierro on the bodies, in the communities, and territories to understand for example the role of Destierro in nation-state, and empire building? What is the analytical scope of Destierro as a category of historical analysis? Some answers to these questions lie in an area that while it has been widely studied, systematic historical *analysis* has been limited: the historiography of land acquisition, and territory making. I outline this question in the following two sections.

The importance of this discussion is that it is imperative to answer the question of why the land in which Bellavista is located today has been systematically disputed in the course of the last four centuries. As I displayed in Table 1 of Chapter 1, underneath contemporary Old and New Bellavista, and Vigía del Fuerte runs the blood of the Indigenous Kuna disseminated in the sixteenth century, and of the Africans, Afrodescendants, diverse contemporary Indigenous communities, Chilapos, and Mestizos systematically disappeared, assassinated, uprooted, and *desterrados* in the subsequent centuries up until today. It is not only the same geographic space, but also the same racialized population, with its reconfigurations, and the same/reconfigured discourses of marginalization. In such case, the analytical framework of forced migration proves not only limited but ineffective to make justice, and repair these populations.

## Developing an Analytics and a Method to Study the Question of Destierro in Colombia

In the global imaginary, the region of Chocó, in the Northwest of Colombia, has long been synonymous with poverty, backwardness, remote isolation, and ignorance<sup>62</sup>. Nonetheless the region has been embedded in global historical conjunctures of capitalist accumulation. The region has been a significant locale for the development of the feudal and capitalist economies of Spain, and the United States since the XVI century (Collins; 1874) (Archer; 1937) (West; 1957) (Sharp; 1975) (Gonzalez; 1997). The legacies of colonialism remain profoundly on the economic and social condition of the region. The inhabitants of this state have served as slaves, in the Colombian colonial era, and after the period of independence, and emancipation became servants in the upper class houses of the country. These two roles have been maintained in the history of Colombia through two further centuries, in which both Indigenous and Afrodescendants have been the targets of development policies and recently the victims of forced displacement.

I use the concept world-historical emptied-space as a working analytical tool of world historical analysis to comprehend how the configuration of territories where conquest, exploitation, violence, *destierro*, politics for development, and contestation for liberation coexist covered by the mantle of the narratives of underdevelopment, marginality, and barbarity. Regions such as the Chocó, which have been represented economically as poor, racially as Black and Indigenous, along the gender lines as ‘virgin’ territories, politically, socially and culturally as ‘backward’. I

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<sup>62</sup> See Annex map No 1.

am conceptualizing world-historical-emptied-spaces as the cradles of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) <sup>63</sup>.

My concern with colonial and contemporary narratives of the region is in part methodological and in part pragmatic. I argue that there is a need to challenge a diverse range of structural, institutional, and everyday representations deeply rooted in political, academic, and popular discourses, which are preventing us from studying systematically populations that have been invented and preserved to be perpetually exploitable. Studying the context of place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization and violence in the territories of the state of Chocó will enlighten alternative ways to comprehend experiences of *destierro*, and new cycles of Diaspora of Afrodescendent and Indigenous populations in the world system because it shares world-historical processes of domination, exploitation, resistance, and emancipation of nations such as Sudan, Iraq, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Pakistan, which happen to be the six largest countries with the highest rates of ‘internally displaced populations’.

### **How do these world-historical emptied-spaces and the subjects of violence form?**

Anthropologist Veena Das argues that there are three components on the formation of the subject of violence: a) Discursive formations that make women victims of violence; b) the experience of becoming a subject, linked to the experience of subjugation; c) Women’s own formation of their subject positions (2001;205). Building on this rational I argue that two historicize land dispossession, with the aim of reparation we need, to describe two opposing logics in the conception of the land that are at play in the case of Bellavista.

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<sup>63</sup> The concepts of coloniality and the coloniality of power were coined by Anibal Quijano. See Quijano (1989, 1991, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). I am using it as a tool to comprehend the world-historical patterning of power in the *longue durée* of historical capitalism; as a specific attribute of the modern regimes of power.

Describing these conceptions gets us to the center of how these spaces have been created as spaces of exploitation, and as spaces of liberation:

Allow me to compare two excerpts to develop this statement:

The members of the Community Council COCOMACIA say

Defending the land we defend our life, it is not our whim, our ancestors have already done it. If today we are divided, and all dispersed, tomorrow whoever will come and will displace us all. Among us there is the war which is the greatest enemy that threatens our land "(COCOMACIA, 2006)<sup>64</sup>

An illegal mine owner precedent from Antioquia portrays the ownership of the lands in the state on Chocó in the following manner:

‘All this-land-at the beginning is nobodies land, but when people come and enter this region, and find gold immediately there is a display of plenty of owners ... they appear all off a sudden, and one without knowing they were owners ... one comes here because everybody does it; entering, exploring to see what can one find, and once people come to know that there is gold they start claiming they are the ‘owners’. Owners in quotation mark because they don’t have ownership titles.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Defendiendo el territorio, defendemos nuestra vida, no es capricho de nosotros, los ancestors ya lo hacian, pero si hoy nos dividimos, y todos nos dispersamos, mañana llega cualquiera y todos nos desplazamos. Es que también tenemos entre nosotros la Guerra que es el enemigo más grande que amenaza nuestra tierra ” (COCOMACIA, 2006)

<sup>65</sup> Jorge Martinez, Administrador Mina- Comunida vilanueva-Municipio Lloró-Chocó- Documental Chocó-La quimera del Oro/Colombia. Rutas de la Solidaridad, documental- Igor Olateta. “ Todo esto-la tierra- en un principio no tiene dueño pero cuando la gente viene y entra a esta región cualquier persona encuentra un poquito de Oro inmediatamente aparecen infinidad de dueños...aparecen de un momento a otro sin saber que eras dueños...porque uno se entra aquí porque todo el mundo lo hace. Entrando, explorando a ver que se consigue y ya cuando se llega a saber que existe oro aparecen los dueños. Entre comillas dueños porque no hay títulos.”



**Disputing land ownership: Violent land appropriation for Capitalist accumulation vs. ancestral claims of right to own the territories of the Colombian Pacific**

This year the afrocolombian community celebrates 158 years of the abolition of slavery in Colombia, and 15 years of the Ley 70/ 93 or Ley the comunidades negras (Law 70 of 1993 or Law of black communities). This piece of law legalizes the right that Afrocolombian communities have owned the land they have worked since the colonial period, in which they fought to gain their freedom and have lived freely for the last two hundred years proximately<sup>66</sup>.

Several articles and books have been published to recognize the political gains that this law represents or to criticize its limitations, as well as to describe the role that it has in the current acts of violence and processes of Destierro (deracination) that these communities are living. It means that, in addition to the killings, kidnappings, and disappearance, the afrodescendent communities of the Colombian Pacific are been victims of a violent process of land appropriation, in which they have all the chances to loss the debate of *who owns the land that is been disputed*. As stated by the mine owner the state of Chocó is conceived by many as an open ‘virgin’ land waiting to be ‘explored and exploited’. But where that idea came from? How was it established, and how has it been used to legitimize *Destierro*?

In 2009 five cases (at least) had called the attention of the afrodescendent movements: The Cerro Careperro, Suarez, Jiguamiandó, Curvaradó, Belén de Bajirá, and Bellavista<sup>67</sup>. After centuries of portraying the state of Chocó<sup>68</sup> as dark, isolated, extremely difficult to ‘penetrate’, mysterious, etc. out of nowhere several agents of the current Colombian government, foreign oil companies, NGOs, among others are claiming the land where these communities are located as

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<sup>66</sup> See Map No 5 Ethnic territories.

<sup>67</sup> See Map. No 2 Municipality of Bojayá

<sup>68</sup> See Map No 1 State of Chocó in America

theirs. Those agents have arrived to these communities with the ‘proper’ documentation, and the highly legitimized developmentalist narrative to claim these lands.

Then, a set of question arises, how do people fight back this neo-colonization and demand respect for their property and autonomy, even in the cases in which they do not have “the ‘proper’ documentation” but have live there for generations? The first step I aim to follow to comprehend this question is to identify what do we know about it?, what is the state-of-art of the initiating practices of land acquisition and territory-making? How do these territories came to be?, How do people started claiming and acquitting the land in the case of the Chocó and making them into their territories?

Answering these questions will display my last set of evidence to assess the limitation of the analytical framework of forced migration to comprehend this case, and societies with similar histories, and characteristics.

### **Historicizing Destierro: Land Acquisition and Territory-Making in the Atrato River**

*How can one describe the historical formation of the notion of “collective territory” claimed by afrodescendent and indigenous communities of the Colombian Pacific? How does this historical description open a space for alternative epistemologies of dislocation?* To start answering these questions, in this section I introduce a preliminary collection of notes towards the construction of a state-of-the-art of the historiography of the initiating practices of land acquisition and territory-making in the period 1810-2000. My aim is not to make a substantive review but to concentrate in the practices of land acquisition and territory making that substantiate the use of the concepts of Destierro and Diaspora. I will develop the model I proposed in Chapter 1. The development of

the ‘D-T-D<sup>2</sup>’ cycle through the colonial, emancipation, independence, and post-emancipation periods.

Most of the references that I found locate the period 1750-1850 as central to understand the processes of establishment of mines in Colombia. The population enslaved to do the mining was organized in slave gangs- *cuadrillas de esclavos*-. The process of emancipation of slavery and the subsequent settlement of the new freed population sets the beginning of the formation of the territories of the contemporary Afro-Pacific. A second major historical stage is located after the liberation of the enslaved population in 1851 until 1930 when they were forced to move to the Pacific coast to establish new communities. Finally, a third historical stage could be located from 1930-to today. I argue that looking at the major ideas and practices related to the making of territories, and the major descriptions of how these processes were drawn during these periods are central to move forward a critical debate about contemporary dispute over land ownership, and the ongoing violent land dispossession.

Historians such as Sergio Mosquera, William Sharp, Orian Jimenez, William Villa, and Robert West, architects such as Jacques Aprile-Gnisset, and Gilma Mosquera offer us the major accounts to this topic. In the light of the empirical evidence found in the literature revised, I distinguish two major lines of analysis. First, the patterns of land acquisition, in which the main units of analysis are the trajectories of socio-spatial formations, land uses, and land rights. Second, the patterns of territory making, in which the main ideas, memories, meanings and beliefs of these communities are considered in the description of the formation of territories and territorialities in the Colombian Pacific.

### **Antecedents on the trajectories of territorial settlement and the patterns of land acquisition and main lines of inquiry**

In this section I confront the trajectories of territorial settlement by maroon Afrodescendent communities, and Indigenous communities that resisted the colonial dissemination, with the discursive construction of these spaces as spaces for capitalist exploitation.

### **World-Historical-emptied-spaces: Thinking about the bases of contemporary processes of Destierro deracination in the department of Chocó-Colombia**

#### **Spaces for exploitation: A comment on 16th-18<sup>th</sup> century`s reports about the Chocó**

The literature produced to describe the history of the department of Chocó links it to the Spanish Empire building. Its place in this history is principally as a dissocialized space for extracting gold. In W. Sharp`s account

“ (t)he Chocó is located in the northwest corner of Colombia, and borders Panama, The Caribbean, and the Atlantic Ocean on the north and west. The region is hot and humid, and heavy rainfall produces a thick tropical vegetation and countless streams and rivers. The Chocó also contains a highly desired mineral-gold. For a century-and-a-quarter during the colonial period-1680-1810- the Chocó became an important source of gold for the Spanish Empire” (Sharp 469).

Evidence between the sixteenth and nineteenth century indicates that ‘explorers’, Spaniard Officials, map readers, miners, and priests, interpreted the Chocó as an area open for exploration and colonialization. It is a constant in the documentation from this period to describe in detail the conditions of the environment, the weather, and the amount of resources available for exploration without mentioning the condition of the population, the organization and life of the communities, which were established in the territory. In the colonial reports the negation of the indigenous and Africans` humanity and its consideration as a commodity placed them within the list of properties of the miners. The mapping of the region of this centuries looks like the

following figure where it seems that all that can be found in the region are mines for exploitation and territories for expansion.

The *Description of the province of Zitara and course of the Atrato River* is one of the most important reports of the explorers of the Province of Zitara and the course of the Atrato River in the state of Chocó. It constitutes the main source of inquiry of the seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries about this territory. I found it useful to mark the main historical stages regarding the initiating practices of land distribution, land acquisition and territory-making.

Its introduction starts with the attempts of colonialization and the relation between indigenous and Spaniards in the colonial period.

It states that:

“ in the sixteenth century several well known attempts to secure the Chocó, including those by Pascual Andagoya, Captain Melchor Velásquez, set the pattern for hardship and failure.(...) All three expeditions ended in disaster as an estimated two-thirds of the soldiers who entered to Chocó with the fanatical captain died of hunger, disease or Indian attack (...) Despite the hardships and examples of failure and death, gold continued to draw adventurers. By the end of the seventeenth century soldiers, miners, priests and officials had conquered the Indians of the central Chocó. They did not defeat the Cuna Indians near the mouth of the Atrato River, but the Noanames and Chocoes, decimated by disease, tamed by friars, and herded into corregimientos by priests and soldiers, offered little resistance to future Spanish encroachment” (3)“Spaniards who entered to Chocó gave and contracted smallpox and were particularly susceptible to many tropical fevers. Because seventeenth-and-eighteenth century accounts describe the Chocó simply as fever-ridden (...) (4).

This suggests three dimensions that seem central to my reading of the significance of this description. First, the way in which the label of ‘empty territories’ serve the purposes of empire building and how Spanish Officials used it to legitimized killing of the native population and the proposal of projects to expand the domain of the empire. This initial moment is what the Spanish Officials called exploration. Second, the complex structure of individuals and functions to make the process of exploitation/colonialization work. This is expressed in the sentence “soldiers,

miners, priests and officials had conquered the Indians”. Third, the role of space-making in the process of exploitation and the use of violence. This is expressed in the sentences ‘indigenous disseminated’ ‘offered little resistance to future Spanish encroachment’. Thus enunciated, the opposition made by the inhabitants is constructed as a savage act that has to be controlled while the territory is violently taken, and exploited.

These processes mark the initiating practices of land acquisition, while plating the basics of the historical and geographical representation of these territories. Thus, even though this region was central to the economical development of the Spanish Empire it remained marginalized, isolated and silenced. In this context, Boyd-Bowman & Sharp write

“once miners actually began exploiting the placer mines in the Chocó early in the eighteenth century, some lucky individuals reaped great fortunes. I have calculated elsewhere, using quinto records and estimates of contraband trade, that the total amount of gold extracted from the Chocó during the period 1680-1810 was worth approximately \$ 83.313.00 silver pesos. This figure while impressive even today (...). On today’s gold market the 416,565 pounds of gold mined in the Chocó would be worth approximately (...) \$ 4.332.276.000 dollars (4)”

The violent and bloody penetration into the Chocó, the exploitation of its territories, and the establishment of the mines brought a threat to the agents of the empire, the illegally exchange of gold. The description about how the Spanish Crown tried to prevent the contraband trade with the Dutch merchants brings an important category to this mapping on the constitution of these territories, and the narratives that accompany this geopolitical construction, which in part justifies the contemporary deracination of its inhabitants.

Thus, Boyd-Bowman & Sharp say “(u)nable to guarantee the loyalty of officials in this isolated gold producing region, Crown authorities sought instead to make illegal shipments to and from the providence easy to detect.” (6) “Although the vigias did not prevent contraband trade, they did prevent the legal passage of merchandise, observers, and passengers into de Chocó by way of the river highways. (...) The Chocó was cut off from outside by geographical barriers and Crown

regulations (...). Isolation, wealth and mystery continued as the prevailing view in the Chocó” (7)<sup>69</sup>

This ‘mixed’ view of isolation, wealth, and mystery not only impacted the economic process of extraction during the XVIII-century, and the relation constructed between the cores of the Empire and its peripheries, but also the foundation of the construction of a region, its culture, and history, as we know it in the modern times.

The Boyd-Bowman & Sharp’s report continues:

“(t)he aura of mystery and wealth sustained interest in the Chocó. Although few actually visited the region official reports(...) continually mentioned the Chocó’s wealth, both real and imagined, and isolation. But because of the Crown restrictions regarding travel on the Atrato during most of the eighteenth century, maps drawn during this century tended to involve either the central mining region or the Darien/Panama area. Maps could not be completed of a region where it was illegal to travel by either visitors or residents without granted special Crown permission. In fact, many smugglers traversed the Atrato River to its mouth but maps and descriptions of their travels could not be committed to anything but memory. Official and family archives remained empty” (7).

Furthermore, they point out

“(i)t is ironic that during the eighteenth century , the century of tremendous mining and agricultural expansion, isolation and crown regulations prevented good descriptions and maps of the Atrato region” (8)

At the end of the colonial period and the beginning of the republican era the representation of the mysterious/silent region was consolidated and the marginality/ignorance of its population was an unquestioned truth, which supported the compartmentalization of the new independent country after 1810. This is why M. Taussig argues “the state’s biggest need is to control massive populations that it does through the ‘cultural elaboration of fear’”. Thus, silence becomes the biggest producer of fear. As a result, in the reports from the republican period up to the 1900s the description of the inhabitants of the territory and their lives is covered with the colonial

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<sup>69</sup> Italic and bold added

narratives of marginality and non-humanity. This last idea is a challenge that students of the territorial construction and the processes of Destierro will have to face and develop strategies, and research agendas to overcome it.

These elements bring us to three fundamental aspects that have influenced the production of knowledge of this region: a) the writing of its history; b) the sources been used; c), the final stories been integrated as 'official' history. First, on the writing of the history of the state of Chocó, the critiques that have been raised regarding the impact that the "prevention of good descriptions and maps of the region of Chocó" has on the historical process of writing its history there is an unanswered question, then How has it helped to create and maintain the representations of backwardness, isolation, and marginality of this region?.

Second, on the matter of the sources, as this report indicates most of the available sources were written to serve the requests of the Spanish Empire. When this is the case the 'other' versions of the same stories remain silenced or tergiversated.

### **On the trajectories of territorial settlement and the patterns of land acquisition**

To historicize the trajectories of territorial settlement and the main patterns of land acquisition, J. Aprile (2004) proposes that describing the past of the Pacific region illuminates in a more comprehensive way the socio-spatial configuration of its territories. The author introduces essential periods for the comprehension of the process of settlement. He has divided it in three 'forms': a) the aboriginal socio-spatial formations; b) the socio-spatial slave training and mining; and c) the socio-spatial formation of agricultural colonization (275). Accordingly, he introduces a description of the multiple processes that led to the configuration of the modern socio-territorial organization.



He suggests that the main features of this process are: a) a socio-spatial formation of an agriculture-based colonization socio b) an endogenous colonization c) a popular colonization of the jungle. Building in these previous descriptions J. and Sotomayor, L. Valderrama(1995) illustrate the process of the settlement of the communities of the Atrato River. They state:

“the process of settlement is given by the flight and slave uprising, but this process is accentuated in the mid eighteenth century, a period during which arose black villages of enslaved runaways or fugitives, who continued working as independent gold washers, and to whom the jungle became an impenetrable refuge. The first villages founded by blacks in the Atrato River were *Ichó*, *Neguá*, *Beberá*, and *Bebaramá* that have served as a fulcrum to reproduce forms of social organization based on the extended household. It is from these places that come to the Medio Atrato the first black communities to found settlements such as Buchadó in 1842 and La Boba in 1882 that come to be the oldest settlements in the municipality of Bojayá. Prior to the emergence of these towns, the Spanish had set up checkpoints and traffic of slaves. This is the case of Vigia del Fuerte founded in the late eighteenth century. One could say that the first wave of settlement takes place along the rivers that descend from the western slopes of the Cordillera Occidental”

A second epoch is identified after 1850, mainly driven by the abolition of slavery. The authors argue:

“ In this period, the black communities expand their economic alternatives to the exploitation of rubber, tagua, radicle and animal skins. During this period the state is concerned to establish a presence in the territory leading to the villages during the administration of justice, and religious education, creating new villages and prompting the growth of existing ones. In this period is defined the structure of the settlements and the territorial distribution of these as a line along the rivers, a pattern that still exists. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the territorial expansion of the black communities is completed the extraction cycle of the raicilla, the tagua, and caucho , and it is the beginning of the process of the strengthening of the occupation of the Medio Atrato. In this moment is founded Opogodó (1,936). In this stage the mobility of black communities is intensified and new processes of the production land are incorporated. The most recent period is identified by the appearance of towns that are considered the extensions of older communities. This process looks for an appropriation of natural resources for subsistence by fewer people compared to the village core. Upon the occupation of the Spanish in what is now the municipality of Bojaya used to lived the Cuna Indian community, which also covered the Bajo Atrato. (Jimeno, M.1995).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Own translation.

In addition, the authors introduce the question of resistance as an important component of these processes. They say,

“the first period of colonization pressure by the Spanish led to the depletion of the indigenous population in the seventeenth century. Thus, the Spanish divided the territory into Indian provinces. Several groups were forced to work in the mines of the tributaries of the Atrato and San Juan rivers. However, in the middle of the century, there were indigenous rebellions that swept the colonial towns and mining centers, culminating in the massive displacement to remote lands especially in the headwaters of rivers and coasts of the Pacific Ocean. Throughout the centuries of Spanish presence there were numerous indigenous movements forcing them to relocate, merge or driving them to extinction. It should be mentioned that cultural changes in indigenous social groups have been as a result of a historical process by the formation of clusters, loss of control over territory and evangelism. During this process the transformation of their production systems takes place by introducing livestock and in general to join the social systems of Spanish and black communities. The creation of the Municipality of Bojayá comprises relatively recent settlements; the oldest is La Boa created in 1883, and Bellavista the municipal seat that was established in 1946. However, the creation of the municipality as a territorial entity was given with Ordinance No. 13 of 12 December 1960.”<sup>71</sup>

*These descriptions are an extraordinary finding to flesh out my argument of the historical formation and repetition of these processes of Destierro. The Cuna Indian Community was disseminated by Spanish explorers in their journey to find gold in the region. Today the Afrodescendent and Indigenous communities living in these territories are being both deracinated and exterminated for those interested in drug dealing, transportation of weapons, and plantation of oil palm.*

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.bojaya-choco.gov.co/nuestromunicipio>. Own translation

## **On the Forms of Land tenure**

Robert West (1957) asserts that:

“The majority of the inhabitants of the Pacific lowlands are not only subsistence farmers. They are squatters as well, just as their great-grandfathers were after the abolition of slavery. Today probably not one farmer in a hundred holds legal title to the land he occupies or cultivates, nor does he pay rent. Much of the Pacific lowland of Colombia is a national domain (terrenos baldíos nacionales), which may be claimed by any person who (1) cultivates or otherwise uses an area amounting to at least a third of this claimant (2) files the requisite paper with the government and pays certain small fees. (...) Some lands are owned or leased by mining concerns; others are held legally by individuals in the interior who have little interest in their development. (...) In the long-occupied mining districts levee, terrace and hill lands near the main settlements are considered to be privately owned by families of the community, each having its written title (título de familia) to certain plots” (153-155)

Furthermore, J. Aprile (2004) affirms that the main forms of land tenure is *the expropiación de facto de los propietarios ausentes* - the expropriation of the absent owners- by cultivating it and cleaning it constantly. The properties obtained are then passed on to the new generations of the family. G. Mosquera reinforces the idea of this *vecindarios parentales* –communities of families- as a form of land tenure. She describes the main dimensions of the *terreno patrimonial* - inherited territory- by listing the principal features that have identified the residential space. She states that the system of villages that developed out of this form of land appropriation configured a historical process of settlement on the land that the enslaved population had worked, and that was previously occupied by the aborigines. The maroon, and freed populations of African descent occupied the riversides, cleaned, worked, and created communities in the land as dispersed productive unities (293)

## **On the forms of land acquisition and State formation**

The multiple patterns of land use and land acquisition that have been presented are influenced by formally established laws. The end of the colonial state brought intense conflicts over land

ownership that marked and oriented the course that these patterns took. To explore this question and integrate it into the study of slavery and the question of land S. Mosquera argues that is frequent in the studies of slavery to leave outside the legislative aspect of it. In this sense he presents a set of archival documents in which the rights of possession, ownership and property of both enslaved and lands are explained.

He introduces the legislative aspects of colonialization in Colombia to explore the importance of the social classification of the population that coming out from slavery goes onto the narrative of the building of the nation. He describes the enslaved as an object of right, the modernization of the Spanish empire, the set of laws that made the abolition of slavery possible, to end up explaining the main gendered discourses that de-constructed the colonial state and built *La República*.

In that sense, he introduces the constitutional changes and major global historical events of the period under revision in this paper. Thus, between 1815 and 1853 these processes of land acquisition are going to be cut across by:

*“ el Congreso de Viena de 1815 y la Real cédula de 1817 sobre la prohibición de la trata negrera de los dominios españoles, la ley de 28 de mayo de 1821 sobre la libertad de partos, la Constitución de la república de Colombia del 30 de Agosto de 1821, la Constitución de la república de Colombia del 29 de Abril de 1830, la Constitución del Estado de la Nueva Granada del 29 de febrero de 1832, la reglamentación de la ley de partos en la Ley 29 de Mayo de 1842, la Constitución política de la república de la Nueva Granada del 20 de abril de 1843, el desmonte del Estado colonial con la ley de abolición de la esclavitud del 21 de mayo de 1851 y la Constitución política de la Nueva Granada del 20 de mayo de 1853”*

Just to mention some of the major political changes in the nation. With the ‘end’ of the colonial state these constitutional changes were followed by policies of “recolonialization” or, let’s say, law prescriptions to keep the domination in these territories. The major pieces of law were : *Resolución de 22 de Noviembre de 1888 sobre concesión de tierras baldías a los denunciantes*

*de minas, Resolución sobre tierras baldías, 28 de Julio de 1894 sobre preferencias entre dos denunciantes,* among others until 1905 covered in this book<sup>72</sup>.

Following Le Grand (1988), there are two major epochs that should also be mentioned. It is important to tie to the processes of land acquisition, which were taken place in the nascent state of Chocó that in the period between 1827-1873 the legislation was designated to ease the fiscal crisis in Colombia-costs of independence- and to strengthen the land titles of the big landowners. Besides, this is important to recognize how in the period between 1874-1930 was recognized the importance of the Economy of the border when this region acquires a central place. Then, the Laws 61, 1874 and 48 of 1882 established that the land should belong to those who cultivate the lands granted the title through free grants, in the cases in which they have worked the land occupied for a period of at least 5 years. Additionally the high transaction costs of certification and local political strength of the landlords prevented the formalization of property rights of farmers. This suggests an important explanation to comprehend the inequalities born in these conditions.

In addition, Webster F, McBryde' piece (1969) building from the description of Human Ecology of Chocó argues that

“land tenure, in new and recent zones, involves a variety of serious problems. Spontaneous settlements result in *de facto* occupation of land without legal title, which in turn gives rise to dispossession and litigation. The farming population may be divided into two main demographic groups: the *libres*, who are little attached to the land, and the *cholos*, who have a close attachment with the land. Neither group is protected by legal title. The presence of these squatters creates some of the most serious. The Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA) is gradually helping farmers to obtain titles” (434)

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<sup>72</sup>MINISTERIO DE OBRAS PÚBLICAS Y FOMENTO. *Recopilación de las leyes y disposiciones vigentes sobre tierras baldías*. Bogotá. 1907

In *Don Melchor de Barona y Betancourt y la esclavización en el Chocó* S. Mosquera (2004) introduces the arrival of the national revolution to Chocó in 1813, where the providences of the time claimed their independence and constituted the town councils of Nóvita and Citará. I argue that these political and economic environment had to mean something to the processes of land acquisition but it is not mentioned in the literature that is describing them. The diaries of the travelers indicate us evidence of this.

Thus, the author brings the question of the disarticulation of the economy of the Nueva Granada after 1810 and the systematic impoverishment of the rich, *what it meant to the enslaved and runaways in their projects of liberation* is an unexplored question. Thus we arrive to the end of this attempt.

### **“Developmentizable” Spaces**

In the twentieth century, the emergence of contemporary forms of globalization, the advance of technology, the emergence of dependency discourses and the compartmentalization of the world according to their ‘degree of development’ brings to the history of the Chocó what Arturo Escobar calls the invention of the Pacific as a ‘developmentizable entity’, and places it as a Third World region within a Third World State, a periphery of the periphery .

Arturo Escobar`s account states that

“ in 1983, the first Plan for the Integral Development of the Pacific coast stated its call for development in the following way: This vast region harbors enormous forests, fishing, and mining resources that are required immediately by the nation; the region constitutes an area of fundamental geopolitical interest for the country. Hence, the inevitability of a state policy capable of understanding and assuming the integral development of the Pacific Littoral as a great national project. This project can no longer be postponed.” (156)

Subsequently, “(w)ith PLADEICOP, the Pacific was constructed for the first time as a “developmentizable entity” Escobar(159).

In 1993 a project funded by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank called ‘Plan Pacifico’ also took place. At the same time the policy document entitled Agenda Pacifico XXI and the Proyecto Bio Pacifico were arranged as initiatives to preserve, develop and modernized the ‘biodiverse Pacific’. This policy prescriptions were been made at the same time that the Law 70 of 1993 or Black communities` Law was been institutionalized. This law was the product of a constitutional change based on the mobilizations of indigenous and afrodescendents organizations both in the rural and urban areas. The Law 70 of 1993 gave to the afrodescendent communities the legal frame to legalize their territories, to structure ethno-education, and an Afrocolombian Cathedra, as well as it states the autonomy of the communities to rule their lives in their territories.

### **Spaces for deracination/Destierro**

Thus the spaces for deracination/ Destierro come to be. The establishment of the law and the beginning of the development projects inaugurated a new era of death, and constituted the spaces for deracination. In the Bajo Atrato region since 1996 to 2002 for every community council meeting structured to legalize a portion of the territory there was a massacre, a collective displacement, or a set of indiscriminate killings. The massacre of Bellavista is just one of those examples.

**World-Historical emptied-spaces full of historically marginalized people: Objects of exploitation, politics, and violence...Subjects of resistance and liberation.**

**The role of Deracination/ Destierro in State building**

This massacre of 2002 in Bellavista took place in an important political and economical moment in Colombia. At this time, there was a debate in the Congress about the importance of this region to plant species of oil palm to make the economy of the country stronger, as well as the importance of the strategic location of Chocó, particularly the Atrato river to both legal and illegal economic activities, such as trade of drugs, arms, wood, medicinal plants, among others. Again the population of this region is erased, and the implementation of these projects is justified with the argument of the powerlessness of the population to administrate their richness.

This description links Tilly's account on the relationship between extraction, protection, state and war making to explain the role of violence in state building.

He states that

“power holders' pursuit of war involves them in the extraction of resources to fuel their efforts, and this in turn encourages them to organize the people in their sphere of control into better capital accumulation systems. This creates a cycle that is what led to the modern states of Europe. The states were not intentionally created, rather they were the inevitable result of this behavior” (172)

“four things states do that are related to violence: war making, state making, protection, and extraction. All four of these depend on the state's tendency to monopolize concentrated means of coercion, and each will reinforce the others” (Tilly,181)

It is also imperative considering that

“building a new state apparatus requires continued extractions of resources from the population. The new tax burden not only worsens old conflicts but also creates new ones, especially with peasants whose primary reason to join the independence movement was to free themselves from the burden of taxation.”(Cohen et al. 903)



The spaces for Destierro/deracination are at the same time spaces of contestation and struggle for liberation. Studying them reveals how these spaces created as empty are actually full of people, but a particular kind: marginalized people, with a determined race, gender, class, and location that make them objects of the coloniality of power, objects of exploitation, politics, and violence, and at the same time subjects of resistance and liberation.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I craft an analytical framework to historicize processes of land dispossession base on the case study of the 2002 massacre of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó-Colombia. The deriving analytics of this study suggest a path to overcome the limitation of the prevailing intellectual, legal, and political framework of forced migration. This is an initiating attempt to demonstrate the need to unthink and deconstruct a conceptual framework that is limited, dubious, and narrow-minded. Such limitations are dangerous in the senses that they contribute to the legitimization of renovated discourses, and practices of domination, and dispossession. With this conception in mind I must recognize that there is still a lot more to be done.

In the *The Monolinguisim of the Other* J. Derrida said

“ In order to demonstrate something it is first of all necessary to understand what one wants to demonstrate , what one means or wants to mean, what you dare claim to mean where for such a long time, according to you, it will be necessary to think a thought that has no meaning”<sup>73</sup> p. 5

In this vein, in this thesis I draft my preliminary understanding of what I want to demonstrate.

In this thesis I draft a theoretical and methodological argument to assess the need to revise and deconstruct the concepts of ‘forced migration’, and ‘forced displacement’. Unthinking these notions offers at least three opportunities: a) to reinforce the claims of the communities, which have been deracinated from their ancestral lands by linking their history of land tenure, territory making, and land dispossession to world-historical conjunctures of local/regional/global cycles of capitalist exploitation; b) to enhance a nascent intellectual model to critically comprehend this

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<sup>73</sup> Derrida, Jacques, Pentrick Monsah . *The Monolinguisim of the Other, or The Prothesis of origen*.

phenomenon by assessing the importance of studying its *long durée*; c) to contribute to the current Colombian debate on how to return the land to the deracinated (desterrad@s), and what could be the more effective laws to be proposed. In this regard, this chapter combines a general review of the forced migration literature as a global field of research specifying the local trends the field has taken in Colombia. This sets the stage for a conceptual and methodological debate on the epistemic and political value of history, geography, and complexity in the study of Afrocolombian Diasporas, as opposed to one dimension of this phenomenon: the forced displacement. The theoretical analysis presented on this chapter draws on over two decades of studies in the field of Forced Migration, and the literature on forced displacement. In addition, it is based on ethnographic field notes, interviews, daily life experiences, and historical research compiled since May of 2002, which will be presented on chapter 2. In chapter 3, I continue the conceptual discussion to propose the notions of Destierro, Diaspora, and Diasporic Deracination as categories of analysis, social mobilization, and reparation. Hence, I highlight the significance of re-writing the memories of Deracination (Destierro), and Diaspora to build more dignifying realities, and to transform marginalized voices into voices of dignity.

Accordingly, the main contributions of this monograph are:

### **1- Ethnographic Contributions**

- An critical ethnographic narrative of the massacre of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002 voicing the experiences and demands of the survivors in the aftermath of the event.
- A depiction of the strategies of resistance developed by the population of the community of Bellavista, to survive, runaway, return and rebuild their community.

## **2- Conceptual Contributions**

- An updated mapping of the major arguments explaining the phenomenon of forced displacement/migration, and emergent trends to go beyond this conceptual framework.
- An Afrodiasporic Decolonial Critique of the epistemologies of Dislocation
- The construction of a profile of the areas, which have been converted into centers of dispute in the state of Chocó, and integrated into the geopolitics of the conflict in Colombia.

## **3- Geo-Historical Contributions**

- A detailed description of the socioeconomic, political and cultural context of the community of Bellavista
- A historical narrative of the process of settlement of the population of Bellavista, its economy, regional society, and the forms of construction of territoriality in the village
- A socio-historical analysis of the changes generated in the community, and the region of the Atrato River after the massacre of 2002

Along with this manuscript there are two more products of this research project: a) a collection of pictures, stories, and songs relating to several experiences of Destierro, not only in the community of Bellavista, but in the Bajo Atrato as a region, which I have compiled in the format of a book aiming to submit it for review. I am hoping someone would be interested in publishing the stories of the interviewees in their own words, with their own faces, and means of resistance; b) a short video to broadcast the process of rebuilding this community, and their every day struggles to confront the violence that still hunts them.

I propose an analytical framework to study processes of Destierro and Diaspora reflecting on the unanswered questions of the current literature of forced displacement and forced migration. I highlight the importance of historicizing processes of land acquisition and territory making to comprehend contemporary process of Destierro/Deracination in Chocó-Colombia. I argue that what makes this phenomenon possible is a long history of a geopolitical construction of Chocó as a “blank space.”

I outline how the representation of the territory as “blank” or “empty”, and open for exploitation and colonialization, rather than as a society with a different culture and history, facilitates practices of genocide and deracination. I present some of the main dimensions of the process of ‘marginalization’ of this region by describing some of the colonial narratives that refer to it. I split the historical formation of these blank spaces up into three categories: the spaces of exploration, the ‘developmentizable’ spaces, and spaces for deracination. I highlight the continuity of the images of isolation and marginality as foundations of state/empire building and deracination.

Hence, I point out how these historical processes of territorial representation lie behind the contemporary deracination of the population of the department of Chocó. I describe how this production of blank space has taken place, and then I state how this logic is reflected in the contemporary deracination of the population of the department of Chocó. In this way, I argue that space-making mediates the relationship between historical transformations of territorial representations and the contemporary practice of deracination. Thus, space-making remains as a significant factor that explains the incidence of deracination not as a causal factor, but as a facilitating feature.

In so doing, I introduce a set of preliminary notes towards a historiography of the initiating practices of land acquisition and territory-making in the state of Chocó between 1810-2010. I present some of the main dimensions of these processes in the state of Chocó. I also highlight the main silences, unexplored questions, and unexplained issues. I emphasize the continuity of the images of isolation and marginality within the narratives presented. It introduces the question of the production of knowledge and its challenges.

Hence, I point out how there is still a lot of research that needs to be done epistemically, and politically to comprehend and challenge contemporary processes of Destierro. Regarding the academic to do's list I argue that:

There are some issues on methodology and theory that need to be addressed.

### **The use of time**

Following Braudel's critique on time the use of time to narrate the history of the world, I argue that there is a lack of systematicity in disintegrating time's importance, its multiplicity, diversity, and complexity to understand the historical processes of this region and the nation. It is followed by a small consideration of the plural temporalities as a strategy to unify the diverse elements of human history that are embedded in these narratives.

I found useful his notion of *world time*, to flesh out this point (Braudel 1980; 19). This notion pretends to contemplate the history of those spaces (or TimeSpaces realities in Wallerstein's narrative) that the "world history does not reach, zones of silence and undisturbed ignorance", the *historical-emptied-spaces*.

### **The use of the relation between time and space**

I also identified that the links between the configurations of space and time are not fully developed. I believe that Wallerstein's notion of TimeSpace reality is an useful move to strength these methodological issues. He points out that spatial categories like East-West and North-South are geographies categories linked with a given time period in which the temporary truce-line became a long-term reality.

### **The use of geographical categories**

In what refers specifically to the geographical categories, such us Chocó this field needs and urgent advance. Beginning with the question of the origin of the name, which still remains unsolved, the study of this region needs to break the mantle of backwardness, isolation, and ignorance that has covered it since the XVI-century. In that sense, Fernando Coronil's claims constitute an important tool to criticize the so-called isolation of the Pacific region and as a consequence the justification of its *natural* (in Quijano's sense) marginality and ignorance of the population. So, the answer to the question of how the Pacific has been represented both discursively and geographically could generate significant narratives to continue Coronil's recommendation of 'imagine geohistorical categories for a nonimperial world' (52). Particularly, whether it is considered that the Chocó is represented simplistically as an underdeveloped zone going backwards and this is precisely the kind of intellectual disposition that denies the possibility of producing knowledge that could be useful to solve the problems of the region.

Indeed, this department has been represented as a space of darkness and impossible to live, as a space of extremely poverty and ignorance, as well as unable to administrate its own resources, on the one hand. On the other hand, this department has been seen as potential for territorial

expansion, as an area open for exploration, and continue colonialization. That is, the department has been constructed economically, politically and geographically<sup>74</sup> as a *historical-emptied-space*

Hence, this colonial, geopolitical, economical, ideological, and historical representation is used as a common place to explain a variety of phenomenon that is occurring in this territory. Describing, or at least outlining the histories behind those representations remains as an epistemic decolonial turn to disentangle colonial continuities of domination, such as deracination, that the population of the department of Chocó faces today. Accordingly, it is important to develop alternative epistemologies to comprehend how this department came to be, and to continue building up futures of dignity.

With those elements I would like to set a debate about the role that colonial narratives play as bases of legitimization of contemporary forms of violence, such as deracination, that go along with political projects driven by the Colombian state.

**The conversations been established between the historical processes described and the political and economical life of the country.**

To conclude, I annotate that in this literature afro-Colombians vision of land possession have been started to be integrated but there is still a lot to be done. There are considerable tensions and

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<sup>74</sup> A future continuation of the findings of this outline could be a description of the maps produced about the department of Chocó to evaluate the patterns and characteristics of the drawing of those. The T. Bassett piece about cartography and empire building in nineteenth-century West Africa indicates how in the mapping of the terrain of conquest the omission of African peoples and politics and the depiction of European settlements and place-names were central to empire building. That is, how more than a mere reflection of conquest, maps helped to produce empire by enabling and legitimating the process of colonization. I am going to indicate how the descriptions of the reports of the explores permit to observe the same phenomenon, but in this particular source of research the omission of the people in Chocó and their politics is reflected for their absence in the report made. See also Coronil, Fernando (1996). "Beyond Occidentalism: Towards non-imperial geo-historical categories," *Cultural Anthropology* 1, 1, 51-87.



silences that need to be solved. For example, tensions and silences between the descriptions of the processes of settlement and the laws established by the state for the colonialization of *tierras baldías*, and the actions of resistance started by the communities. Put differently, I argue that still there is an isolation of the events occurring in the state of Chocó in relation to the rest of the country. It is observable in the marginal reference or under consideration of its significance to understand the dynamics of the period studied in the country. Additionally, it has not been problematized in a more comprehensive way the fact that after the formal abolition of slavery there has been systematic attempts to maintain control over these territories, how the state established politics of re-colonialization, the conflicts it introduced, people's responses, the establishment of the notion of *tierras baldías*, the repetition and renovation of these processes that help to comprehend the impact of today's new establishment of gold-extraction and palm oil companies in communities such as Cerro Careperro, Suarez, Jiguamiandó, Curvaradó, Belén de Bajirá, and Bellavista that have already experienced these processes in their past.

Believing that names, concepts and terminologies set up a field of power, the basic argument I have developed here is that the concept of forced migration is formula for historical erasure. As Michael Roulp-Trouillot argues terminologies demarcate a field, politically, and epistemologically. Names set up a field of power<sup>75</sup> the use of the concept forced migration routinizes this practice by providing, in the name of humanitarianism, rationales for conquest, exploitation, and domination. Forced Migration and analogous terms allude to a temporal condition, the physical move being made 'the displacement'. It emphasizes the external force inducing the move, and leaves out the local meanings, and the history of the region affected, which could inform the

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<sup>75</sup> Michel- Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon press (1995) (115)

social forces behind the events inducing the move. Whatever would have happened in the region, and to the population targeted as forced displaced is reduced to nothing because it is erased from the conceptualization. I will argue then, that the categories used to name and comprehend phenomena of this nature need to be contextually and historically specific. Land and territories connote neither the same in every society, nor the same at every historical epoch. Territories are socio-geo-historical formations that can only be understood within the context in which they are conceived, produced, re-produced, and unproduced (Almario, 2004)(Arboleda, 2007)(Vergara-Figueroa 2008). Consequently, the use of notions to comprehend the experiences of land dispossession are only understood within the context in which the idea and meanings of the land and territories have been conceived, produced, re-produced, and unproduced. Land dispossession has different meanings to the populations affected. Therefore, the notions used to this process must consider local meanings of land and territory. Historical analysis as an analytic to unthink/deconstruct the notion and field of Forced Migration implies that scholars will have to historicize the processes of territorialization (Almario 2004), land tenure, land acquisition to comprehend how the violent uprooting of a population denotes in the long durée of the life of any population. This certainly implies breaking most prevailing assumptions of the impossibility of studying, or quantifying the realities of the populations constructed as being so far away of civilized life, or where violence will make life impossible for the 'safety' of the author. But this will have to be done if social transformation means something else than just a terminology.

I would like to end with the words of the Nigerian Novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. While describing the danger of the single story she says

“the consequence of the single story is this it robs people of dignity...stories have been used to dispossess... stories can break the dignity of the people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity”.

Unthinking the concepts of forced displacement, and forced migration, as well as Bellavista as an event of forced displacement is an attempt to write stories that can repair the broken dignity of those that have been, and still are continually abused. Imperial tactics of colonial and postcolonial domination hidden in these continuing abuses could not be unveiled in their complexity, and consequently deconstructed to produce new histories and realities, until the intellectual models and categories that sweetened them are un-thought and deconstructed.

*He dicho*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> It translates as I have said! Story telling is a significant component of the everyday life of the people of the Colombian Pacific. Every time the elders tell a story, at the end they will say with a strong accent “*he dicho!*” (I have said!), to indicate the power of the story that has been told.

## APPENDIX

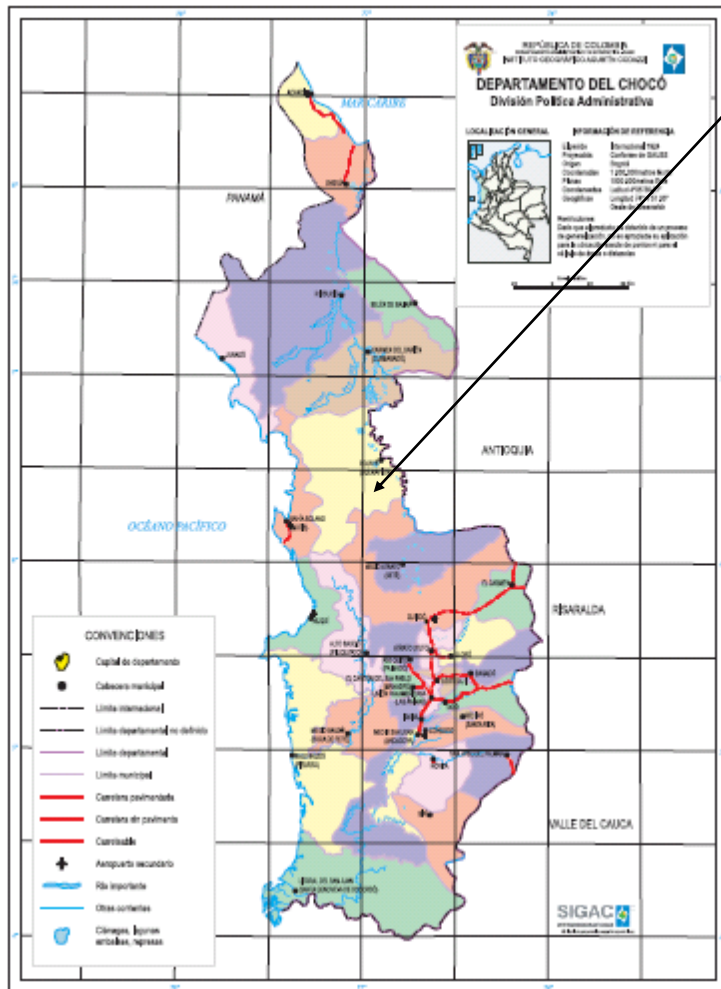
### ADDITIONAL MAPS

**Map A1: Colombian Pacific Region, Department of Chocó in Latin America**



Fuente: [www.michoco.org/departamento\\_-\\_Departamento\\_](http://www.michoco.org/departamento_-_Departamento_)

## Map A2: Political-administrative division of the department of Chocó, Municipality of Bellavista



Source: Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi

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Maria and Family  
Josefa and Family  
Maria II and Family  
Josefa II and Family

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<sup>77</sup> Names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their identities. Additional information on Chapter 2.

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