

Between the Paternalistic and the Neoliberal State

Dispossession and Resistance in Afro-descendant Communities of the Upper Cauca, Colombia

by

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The sugarcane agro-industry and large-scale mining have generated a profound change in traditional economic practices in the upper Cauca of Colombia to the detriment of the small-scale farmers and miners of the local Afro-descendant population. This has been accompanied by a consolidation of the centralized state since the neoliberal opening and a weakening of the old regional state supported by the paternalistic structure of the agricultural elites. Participative research with two community organizations with regard to the dispute over access to land and environmental assets reveals that the communities and their social organizations have responded to their racialized impoverishment by mobilization and the creation of alliances not only as a means of resistance but also as a strategy for the construction of their own alternative life plans.

La agroindustria de caña de azúcar y la minería a gran escala han generado un cambio profundo en las prácticas económicas tradicionales en el Cauca Alto de Colombia, en detrimento los agricultores y los mineros de pequeña escala de la población afrodescendiente locales. Esto ha sido acompañado por una consolidación del Estado centralizado desde la apertura neoliberal y un debilitamiento del viejo Estado regional apoyado por la estructura paternalista de las elites agrícolas. La investigación participativa con dos organizaciones de la comunidad con respecto a la disputa sobre el acceso a la tierra y los bienes medioambientales revela que las comunidades y sus organizaciones sociales han respondido a su empobrecimiento racializado por la movilización y la creación de alianzas, no sólo como medio de resistencia, pero también como una estrategia para la construcción de sus propios proyectos de vida alternativos.

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Referred to as “the tip of the iceberg” of the conflicts of armed groups in Colombia (Arévalo Rodríguez, 2011; Rodríguez Garavito, 2012), the violence of the upper Cauca is explained by the variety of actors and interests and by the complexity of its relations in the dispute over access to and ownership of the land and the environmental assets of the territory. The control of the area to secure drug trafficking and money laundering routes is another dimension linked to the mechanisms of dispossession and territorial environmental degradation (Dávalos, Bejarano, and Correa, 2009; Rincón-Ruiz and Kallis, 2013). The variegated responses of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and mestizo peasants who have resisted since colonial times in defense of their people and their territories is no less important in understanding this historic site of regional conflict.

During the past six decades, agro-industry and large-scale mining have generated a profound change in traditional economic practices to the detriment of Afro-peasant systems based on traditional farming. In the upper Cauca, the traditional farm has been the system of production and reproduction (Bernstein, 2010) of the way of life of the Afro-peasant local communities that have disputed the *hacendados*¹ and capitalist systems in these physical and sociocultural spaces. The Cauca River has been key to agricultural production, small-scale extraction of minerals such as sand and gold, artisanal fishing, hunting, and conservation of forest and wetland ecosystems (Taussig and Rubbo, 2011). In addition, the ways of life of local societies have been affected by the armed conflict and forced migration that have accompanied the introduction of these models of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2007; Vélez-Torres, 2012). In the midst of the explicit violence of armed conflict, the communities and social organizations have responded to their racialized impoverishment by mobilizing and creating alliances not only as a means of resistance but also as a strategy for the construction of their own alternative life plans (Ng’weno, 2007).

Using collaborative principles of research (Vélez-Torres, Rátiva, and Varela, 2012), we proposed to answer the following question: How do two Afro-descendant communities, inhabitants of different ecosystems of the upper Cauca, perceive and mobilize in the face of conflicts associated with the changes in the use of land in the region? The most salient conflicts of the region were those deriving from the expansion of sugarcane agro-industry between 1955 and 2000 and the large-scale gold-extractive industry that became established after 2002. This article has three parts: a regional history and geography beginning with an analysis from the perspective of the watershed (Cohen and Davidson, 2011) and a description of our methodology; a critical analysis of the two models of accumulation that we identify as the main source of the socio-environmental conflicts in the region, agro-industry and large-scale mining, in counterpoint with the communities’ resistance to dispossession; and a discussion of the differences between the private sectors associated with the two models of accumulation, the forms that the regional and national government have assumed in the two contexts, and the deepening of the impoverishment of the Afro-peasant communities inhabiting the banks and tributaries of the upper basin of the Cauca River.

REGIONAL HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY, ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our historical analysis of private accumulation in the upper basin of the Cauca River is based on a political and conceptual decision (Cohen and Davidson, 2011) to take the physical and social space of the river as the analytical focus of socio-environmental conflict. Analysis at this scale does not correspond to a purely technical or political-administrative unit but refers to the historical construction of an economic geography in which the communities of the region dispute the control of territory. Accordingly, we seek to characterize the processes of surplus accumulation that have impacted the local Afro-peasant communities, analyze the articulations between different private actors and the different forms the state has assumed, and describe the current forms of local communities and organizations in response to the effects of this accumulation on their sociocultural and economic processes. This analysis allows us to understand the upper basin of the Cauca River from an environmental and sociopolitical perspective in terms of the spatial planning exercised by the hegemonic powers, which has been contested by the local residents through territorialized practices of resistance.

Dispossession in the upper Cauca follows a historical trajectory in which land ownership and land use have been disputed (Peluso and Lund, 2011), on the one hand, by the local societies of Nasa indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and mestizo peasants that have derived their livelihood from diversified productive and reproductive practices with stable levels of production and consumption (Bernstein, 2010) and, on the other hand, by a regional elite made up initially of landowners, heirs to colonial structures of power that established a reduced regional state in the service of sugarcane agro-industry, and later of representatives of multinational mining capital in alliance with a precarious centralized state that sought to consolidate itself in the region. This tension corresponds to what Harvey (2003) has characterized as the cyclical consolidation of neoliberalism, which uses economic and coercive measures to ensure surplus capital accumulation on the part of one sector of society at the cost of the dispossession of larger social groups, which in this case belong to ethnic communities.

In this context, the regional state has taken various forms, starting with a marginal, limited state dominated by regional elites and landowners (Sáenz, 2005) interested in agro-industrial development of the plain, with strong paternalistic control over the inhabitants of their estates, descendants of former slaves. Recently, a state connected with the central power of the nation has emerged that presents itself as “modern” and “multicultural” in that it has opened up space for the ethnic claims of Afro-descendants and indigenous people. However, this national state is contradictory in that it represses those claims with a highly bureaucratic apparatus and by providing opportunities for the anonymous transnational capital that supports it.

The region that we call the upper Cauca is made up of the municipalities located in the northern Department of Cauca and the southern Department of Valle del Cauca, which are part of the hydrographic basin of the Cauca River. Historical and sociocultural continuity in this area has been woven around the

old ranches and sugar plantations. Currently, the economy of households in the flatland area of the upper Cauca is mainly associated with the agro-industrial cultivation of sugarcane (Pérez and Álvarez, 2009), with the exception of some plots that maintain the efficiency of the Afro-peasant systems (DANE and SIDSE, 2005: 34). While sugarcane occupies two-thirds of the plain of the Cauca Valley (ASOCAÑA, 2012: 70; Perafán, 2005: 2), the rest of the land accommodates a wide urban network of medium-sized cities and towns that have Cali as their regional capital. Traditional farming and small and medium-scale artisanal mining in the foothills and mountains still dominate the landscape, together with some cultivation of coniferous timber (Ng'weno, 2007).

In the northern Department of Cauca, 23 percent of the population identify themselves as black and 22 percent as indigenous (Urrea, 2010). According to statistical analyses that link racial and social class indicators (Barbary and Urrea, 2004: 106; Urrea et al., 2010: 701), Colombia has a geography of socio-racial discrimination on a national scale that is more marked in the rural Pacific region, including the upper Cauca. In the Department of the Valle del Cauca, poverty rates for Afro-descendant households are 48.2 in the municipal centers and 68.2 elsewhere. These figures contrast with poverty rates in the region's nonethnic population estimated at 36.5 in the municipal centers and 61.5 in the remainder. This comparative estimate allows us to confirm that there is racialized impoverishment in the region that could be analyzed as a form of environmental racism articulated with the consolidation of neoliberalism.

The Afro-descendant communities of this region have a long history of subjugation and resistance going back to the seventeenth century, when Africans were imported, enslaved, and forced to work in the gold mines and on the colonial haciendas of the Province of Popayán (Colmenares, 1979). Slaves who managed to free themselves in the upper Cauca started small farms in the forest and marketed tobacco and other products (Herrera, 2009: 159). These farms peaked during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (Taussig, 1980). Inhabitants of the mountains complemented the production of their agricultural farms with work in small-scale mining, using the same technology and land as the Spanish colony. Thus the space inhabited by these Afro-descendant communities until the mid-twentieth century can be understood in terms of the interweaving of the social and economic processes that developed and the productive but also symbolic relationship with the physical space and the local ecological structure (Escobar, 2000). The establishment of communities of freedmen during the period of slavery (Taussig, 1980) shows that Afro-descendants' resistance in the upper Cauca is as old as their presence in the territory. During the past three decades these communities have made their Afro-descendant identity and political mobilization visible (Hurtado, 2000) in dialogue with the opportunities generated by the 1991 constitution and Law 70 of 1993, which recognized ethnic and territorial rights.

In order to understand the continuities and differences of this territorial transformation from the communities' perspective, we conducted collaborative research between 2009 and 2011 on two Afro-descendant villages: the mountain village of La Toma and the flatland village of El Hormiguero (see Figure 1) and their most representative social organizations. Our analysis has allowed us to characterize two forms of the regional government's presence in

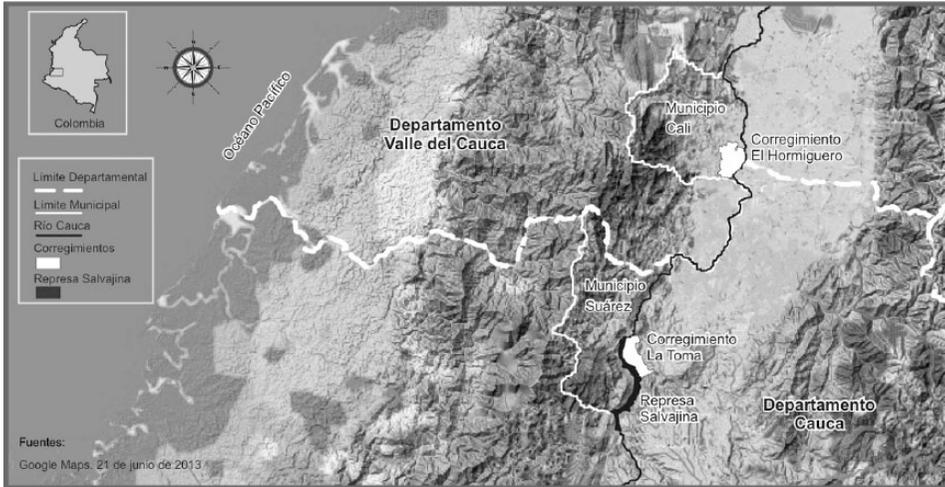


Figure 1. Locations of El Hormiguero and La Toma.

the upper Cauca and describe the ways in which the local communities' relationships with regional economic elites and multinational corporations have been constructed.

The social organizations we worked with were the community councils of El Hormiguero and La Toma, the Palenke of the upper Cauca (a regional organization), and the Process of Black Communities (a national organization). The participative methodology (Fals Borda, 1979; 2001) called for workshops on local memory and the construction of cartographies of land occupation and use (see Vélez-Torres, Rátiva, and Varela, 2012). These research strategies sought to complement two types of stories about the rural experience: oral, represented in historical and memory narratives about their own communities, and visual, represented by the characterization of their territories on maps. In both cases, we sought to generate a written systematization but most of all a dialogue that would contribute to useful communication.²

TWO MODELS OF ACCUMULATION IN THE UPPER CAUCA: CONFLICTS AND RESISTANCES

The last phase of dispossession in the upper Cauca began in the plain in the mid-1950s, when the monoculture of sugarcane was expanded. More recently, multinational mining companies have turned their attention to the alluvial deposits of the Cauca River, threatening the communities settled on these lands with displacement. In the following, we analyze these two models of accumulation by dispossession from the perspective of the area's residents and local social organizations. Each model is based on an industry (agriculture or mining) analyzed in relation to the state structures that support it. In addition, we take into consideration the local communities' and organizations' responses to the appropriation of their land and environmental assets, which demonstrate

their vigorous capacity to resist the transformations imposed by private corporate economic agents.

AGRO-INDUSTRY

The adaptations of the land and the river for the planting and processing of sugarcane constitute a regional phenomenon that has generated conflicts and responses in the two communities under study. In El Hormiguero the participants in our workshops recalled the rapid advance of the monoculture of sugarcane, while in La Toma they related this monoculture to the construction of the Salvajina dam.

Industrial production of sugar began in the city of Palmira in the northern Department of Valle del Cauca at the beginning of the twentieth century because of the region's connection to international markets through the Pacific Railroad and the Panama Canal (Bermúdez, 1997). Residents of El Hormiguero spoke of the arrival and expansion of this monoculture in terms of several historical milestones: about 1948, when Ingenio Meléndez began cultivating sugarcane with modern technology; early 1960, when the United States and Cuba broke trade relations and Colombian production expanded to satisfy North American demand (Perafán, 2005: 8); and 1985, when the Salvajina dam was completed and the land above it was flooded.

Before this expansion, at the end of 1940, the residents of El Hormiguero depended for subsistence on a complex multiproduct system of rotation agriculture, hunting, small-scale fishing, and temporary or permanent employment on cattle ranches and grain-producing estates in the area. As can be observed in the historical map produced by the community (see Figure 2), in the middle of the twentieth century they and their parents took advantage of the floodplain of the Cauca River, which was neglected by ranchers.

The farms' varied production allowed the town's residents access to a wide variety of foods for most of the year, in addition to the wages of family members employed by the estates. During rainy seasons (April–June and October–December), El Hormiguero residents took advantage of the abundance of fish in the *madres viejas*³ and harvested coffee that they sold in the region's markets. The floods also fertilized the farmlands, allowing landowners to avoid the use of chemical fertilizers to maintain their production. During dry seasons (January–March and July–September), residents replaced fish with farm animals and animals that they hunted in the native forest or along the Cauca River, such as armadillo (*Dasyproctapunctata*), possum (*Didelphismarsupialis*), and iguana (*Iguana iguana*). They also took advantage of the mudflats created by the floods to collect and sell sand. During these months, offers of work multiplied on the estates because of the harvests of rotation crops such as rice, corn, beans, and sunflowers: "We would all go to work [on the estates]. That was manual work, pulling rice by hand and beans as well. That way we had work and the hacendados would give us the gleanings" (participant in memory workshop, El Hormiguero, 2011).

El Hormiguero residents are nostalgic about this system of subsistence combining the multiproduction of the traditional farm with day labor on the agricultural estates and ranches because it brought them a level of food autonomy

construction of the Agua Blanca irrigation district in Cali. This project included levees along the Cauca River and the channeling of its tributaries to contain the rising waters and reclaim 5,600 hectares of land to the east of the city for agricultural and urban expansion (Vélez-Torres and Vélez-Galeano, 2011). This project was part of a wider project of drainage canals and levees in the Cauca Valley (Perafán, 2005: 7). This process of draining wetlands, inspired by the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States and transmitted as a development project by World Bank officials to the landed elites of the Cauca Valley (CVC, 1985; Escobar, 1998), coincided with the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba, its main provider of sugar up to that moment. The owners of the Colombian mills took advantage of the opportunity to increase their sugar production and fill the void.

The expansion of cane production led to the gradual reappropriation of land in the upper Cauca that its owners had abandoned as unproductive scrub and wetland. At the same time, the landowners bought and rented many farms that since the 1970s had been impacted by the Green Revolution—the incursion of the monoculture model and the dependence that it generated on the purchase of seeds and agro-chemicals. In addition, the debt-producing programs driven by government agricultural development and other international institutions (such as the International Center of Tropical Agriculture) ended up compromising land tenure—legalized or not—through titles. This process of industrialization of agriculture through land appropriation generated a transition from the paternalistic logic of the hacendados to a logic in which the land market was increasingly influenced by central government institutions.

Afterward, in the 1980s, the CVC constructed the Salvajina dam in the mountains of the upper Cauca. With the construction of this dam, the families on the estates sought to ensure the expansion of sugarcane monoculture. The illusion created by this project had two faces: On the one hand, as the country's first multipurpose project, designed to decontaminate the river, control its flow, and generate energy for industry, it created great expectations of regional economic development and positioned regional elites in the vanguard of the development discourse at the national level. On the other hand, being constructed in a rural zone that had not had electricity, it generated among the residents of La Toma and the surrounding communities not only the hope of access to electricity but also the moral responsibility of allowing the construction of the dam and the flooding of their land to allow electricity to reach the entire territory and to end the flooding of the plain. Both aspects assumed the domination of technology over nature, a promise that the discourses of progress and development of the private sector and the regional state used to promote the project.

The residents of La Toma were surprised to see before their eyes what seemed impossible: the furious flow of the Cauca River stopped in the area known as *salvagina* (wild), alluding to the force of the waters. The illusion created proved to be a chimera of progress that the state was incapable of nurturing for very long (Coronil, 1997): the local residents soon discovered the deception that one town resident of La Toma describes: "We were promised progress and jobs, but workers and food were even brought from outside. It was a total fraud" (interview, La Toma, 2011). In addition, the flooded lands had been wrongly evaluated and inadequately paid for, while drinking water, sewage disposal, and sufficient access to electricity never reached beyond the municipal center.

The construction of the dam and its privatization transformed the state in La Toma (Vélez-Torres, 2012). First, after the crisis in colonial mining at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the consequent concentration of landowners' economic activities in the plain of the Cauca Valley (Colmenares, 1979), the construction of the Salvajina dam involved the territorial presence of the regional government. The paternalistic logic that the landowners had developed in the plain was reproduced in the promises that the CVC made to the community about the construction of hospitals, schools, and highways. The sale of the dam and the arrival of the multinational Union Fenosa in 2000, implemented by the central government through the Law of Privatizations (Law 226 of 1995), interrupted the weak link with the regional government, overlooked the promises made, and marked a transition at the local level toward a more centralized model of the state. This process led to the community's confronting the national government as its principal opponent in that it favored the private interests of multinational corporate capital.

The Salvajina project seemed to work against the Afro-peasant communities. El Hormiguero residents recall 1984 as the year of the last great flood on their lands, "the last that was strong, that brought resources, that left the beach full of fish and from which we could take home food" (participant in memory workshop, El Hormiguero, 2011). Then the dam built in Suárez began to fulfill its promise of helping the sugarcane growers eliminate the marshes to increase the area available to agro-industry. Consequently, a resident described other transformations of the ecosystem as follows: "We were left with no forest to hunt, gather wood, and make new farms, and the birds were also homeless, because, unfortunately, now their lives are worse than ours." The birds associated with the forest and the wetlands played a fundamental role in the traditional farm system, being spreaders of seeds and, as such, guarantors of the genetic diversity of crops. At the same time, sugarcane expansion involved the intensification of the use of pesticides and fertilizers: "Since they [sugarcane cultivators] needed pesticides to avoid pests, they began to create instability in nature. Because, for example, when I spray insecticide I am killing certain animals that fertilize the flowers of, say, soursop, and that's why we began to have problems with the production of soursop and many other products, because we no longer had anything to pollinate them" (participant in memory workshop, El Hormiguero, 2011).

The environmental transformations produced by and for the expansion of sugar agro-industry in the plain generated imbalances in local Afro-peasant society, whose agriculture had benefited from the nutrients brought in by the floods, the pollinating insects, and the birds that spread seeds, all of which were reduced as the landscape was homogenized. As sugarcane gained ground, it began to asphyxiate with pesticides and burn⁴ subsistence crops, forcing the Afro-peasants to sell their land at low prices and move to the town center. At the same time, agriculture ceased to be profitable when it could not be complemented by fishing, hunting in the forest, and seasonal work on the estates.

LARGE-SCALE MINING

Faced with the reduction of farms after the construction of the dam and the expansion of sugarcane, El Hormiguero residents opted for "rummaging,"

turning to the Cauca River for the intensive extraction of sand. The first residents to extract sand did so in the 1950s. Sand extraction was then seen as a complement to the family economy and an activity undertaken in summer, when the collection of the material could be done manually. With the intensification of sugarcane cultivation and the crisis in Afro-peasant economies after 1985, the townspeople depended more and more on this activity. Soon the introduction of new technologies such as *malacates*⁵ (winches) allowed access to deposits of riverbed material year-round. The majority of winch owners were outsiders and operated without any kind of license. During the winter, the artisanal sand collector was obliged to pay the winch owner for the trip to the town's beach to sell the sand. During the summer, the sand collectors still used buckets to collect sand in the mudflats, competing with the mining dredges that landowners had installed on the banks of the river since 1970.

The story goes that it was "Grandma Sardi," the matron of one of the main families of landowners of the municipality of Cali, who, on seeing "a bunch of Negroes in line carrying sand by the river, named this village 'Hormiguero' (antnest), changing its original name of El Alizal" (participant in memory workshop, El Hormiguero, 2011). Thus the weight of racial categories and landowner power structures naturalized the artisanal extraction of sand as the "traditional" economic activity of the people of El Hormiguero, erasing the collective memory of their agricultural past, their former importance in providing food for the city, and the violent social change that they experienced during the second half of the twentieth century.

For the residents of La Toma, the most important impact of the construction of the dam was economic dependence in the context of lode mining.⁶ Before the valley was flooded in 1985, local residents practiced agriculture along with placer mining on the river's edge. Only occasionally did they engage in lode mining in the hills. After the flooding, the residents who did placer mining lost fertile lands, their main form of subsistence, and were forced to increase their mining activity in the mountains, where the land was unsuitable for farming. At the same time, the flooding of the valley increased competition over the physical space required for agriculture. Figures 3 and 4 show the environmental degradation of the region in the first 15 years after the dam's construction. A representative of the La Toma community council forcefully explained this transformation of the landscape:

It's no secret to anyone that the best fertile lands were left on the edges of the Salvajina or covered with water. So we had to climb what we call "the hill," and most people say that in those hills all you get is rabies. . . . The people began to farm in some forest areas of the mountains, but since they were not fertile lands the farms did not produce.

The CVC's appropriation of La Toma's fertile lands weakened the relationship between artisanal mining and peasant agriculture, which had been seasonal, complementary activities. Different products for local consumption and for the regional markets were cultivated in the winter, when it was impossible to mine the rivers. In the summer, while the crops grew, the community engaged in placer mining on the riverbanks, and the gold they recovered was



Figure 3. Satellite image of the area before the construction of the Salvajina dam, 1984 (Land Processes Distributed Active Archive Center, U.S. Geological Survey [<http://lpdaac.usgs.gov>]).



Figure 4. Satellite image of the area after the construction of the Salvajina dam, 1999 (Land Processed Distributed Active Archive Center, U.S. Geological Survey [<http://lpdaac.usgs.gov>]).

complemented by the family's subsistence economy. The construction of the dam disrupted this cycle by appropriating not only the land but the river itself, which had served as a means of transport of people and products to Cali, as well as for fishing and recreation. Those who did not migrate had to focus their productive activities on gold mining, barely supporting themselves with the cultivation of coffee, the market for which has been unstable since 1989 because of the abandonment of the international coffee agreement.

Mining in La Toma intensified in three ways: increase in placer mining in the Ovejas River and other tributaries of the Cauca, pursuit of new options for superficial excavation and extraction of gold hydraulically, and the opening of new lode mines and the deepening of existing ones. All these changes involved

residents in a major technification of artisanal methods that required economic investments that excluded those who lacked capital (Dussel, 1984; Santos, 1979). While competition for land use has not been dramatic at the local level—either because of migration or because of principles of solidarity and collective management—the need to invest in technology to ensure better and more efficient extraction of gold has begun to worry local leaders, who are designing cooperative strategies and work-shift rotation to compensate for technological shortcomings that reduce the profitability of the mines.

The main worry of the leaders and local residents, however, has not been the barriers in accessing technology. In 1995, some 20 outside-owned backhoes arrived at the Ovejas River to extract gold, causing the diversion of its banks and the flooding of several farms. This led to the mobilization of local townspeople, who saw their means of subsistence and the tranquillity of their territory threatened. In 1997, the Salvajina was privatized, becoming the property of the Pacific Power Company, S.A., and a project for the diversion of the Ovejas River began.

After the loss of the Cauca River to the dam, the Ovejas River, tributary of the Cauca River, represented ... not only an important area for artisanal gold extraction for the population but also an area valued for its landscape, recreational, and cultural meaning—a symbol of dignity that the community would not let be snatched away. A young woman leader said,

Seeing how they deceived our people during the construction of the Salvajina gives me strength to fight today, first so that they do not divert the Ovejas River and second so that this territory doesn't get taken over by a multinational corporation, because the Salvajina took away half of our body and if they take away the other half that is the Ovejas River it's as if they're killing us.

Supported by the ethnic and territorial rights conferred on Afro-descendant populations by the 1991 Constitution and Law 70 of 1993, the community confronted the double threat represented by the diversion and the backhoes in a public meeting held in February 1995. The government authorities present agreed to demand the withdrawal of the backhoes and conduct an environmental impact study (which was deemed inadequate in 1997). While it seemed that the community had triumphed over the private interests of accumulation, it was soon to confront what it considered the most violent territorial threat since slavery.

Although there had been guerrillas in the upper Cauca since 1970, it was the paramilitary incursion into the study area in 2000–2004 that was the main source of conflict over access to and control of land and environmental assets. The Calima Block of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defenses of Colombia—AUC) penetrated the area to dispute the guerrillas' military domination. This block, commanded by Herbert Veloza (alias H.H.), controlled an extensive area of the upper Cauca through violent means and generated at least 1,163 murder victims (Jimeno et al., 2011; *Verdad Abierta*, 2013). La Toma, in particular, was recognized as one of the areas most impacted by paramilitary control in those years. The communities condemned the granting of mining rights to private companies behind their backs and in

territories in which, being populated by Afro-descendants, free and informed prior consultation was required according to the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 (adopted by Colombia in 1991). The paramilitary presence facilitated exploration activities by putting armed pressure on the sale of properties and controlled mobilization and denunciations by community leaders by murder, threats, and displacement.

As a result, Kedahda Society, S.A., an affiliate of the multinational corporation Anglo Gold Ashanti in Colombia (Muñoz, Idárraga, and Vélez, 2010), acquired the title to 50,000 hectares between the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires for the exploitation of gold and other minerals (Observatorio de Discriminación Racial, 2011). In addition, the company entered into agreements with private titleholders for the transfer of their titles to the multinational corporation. It was precisely in 2004, just after the demobilization of the AUC, that the first order for protection was requested on the part of these titleholders in an effort to evict the traditional agro-miners from the area of the titles. In 2006 the community of La Toma and various social organizations of the region mobilized in two demonstrations in the city of Cali and through the Minga Social, Indígena y Popular (a national indigenous organization), which peacefully occupied the farm La Maria to demand that the regional and national governments guarantee the rights of ethnic groups. In 2008, Kedahda Society, S.A., went out of business and Anglo Gold Ashanti, with an apparently cleaner image for local people, took its place. In 2009, at the same time as the community council of La Toma was asking for titles to this territory in accordance with its constitutional rights, the Suárez mayor's office acceded to the private titleholders' request for an order of protection and once again ordered the eviction (Observatorio de Discriminación Racial, 2011).

Almost 7,000 residents of La Toma refused to be displaced. As part of its strategy of mobilization, in 2010 the community council issued an order revoking the mining rights granted in the territory without prior consultation, and, although it was rejected by the court in Popayán, the Constitutional Court affirmed it. On April 25, 2011, the Court issued Judgment T-1045A recognizing the right of Afro-descendant communities to their territory and ordering the suspension of any title allocation or project that had not been lawfully processed through prior consultation.

The model of displacement with which the mining industry sought to gain ground in La Toma consisted, as we have seen, of a relationship favorable to private accumulation among economic actors, the national government, and the paramilitaries. There is no other explanation for the fact that the period of greatest illegal armed control by the AUC coincided with the peak of the titling process or for the counterpoint between complaints and mobilization on the part of the community and the direct threats made by the paramilitary groups operating in the area. The multinationals were pursuing opencast gold mining, with which mining done by backhoes in riverbeds could not compete in terms of the resources they aspired to extract. The advance of the national colonists and their private security forces served as a first approach to confrontation with the communities, generating displacement and weakening community social structures and oppositional responses. The presence of the colonists also had

the demographic effect of reducing the proportion of Afro-descendant residents of the area and delegitimizing ethnic rights such as prior consultation.

The situation became more complex when alliances among narco-traffickers, illegal armed groups, and illegal gold miners emerged to facilitate money laundering and safeguard transport routes, processing laboratories, and coca plantations. The local and regional governments neglected their responsibilities, sometimes to avoid confrontation and favor the interests of private actors and sometimes to favor the private interests of the officials themselves. In this scenario, what was at issue was not just the government's competence but also its interest in enforcing the rights of the Afro-peasant populations. For its part, the national government displayed contradictions among its various ministries and institutions. Finally, in the midst of ambiguity and dispute over political powers at the central level, illegality reigned at the local level and contributed to what an older man in La Toma characterized as "fishing in troubled waters."

CONCLUSIONS

The sugarcane agro-industrial model and the corporative model of large-scale mining have generated a social transformation associated with the loss of the traditional farm. The expansion of these models has generated an intensification and economic dependence in the face of lode mining of gold in La Toma and sand collection in El Hormiguero. This has generated a change in the ways of life of the Afro-descendant families, who traditionally had diverse economies involving complementary small-scale extractive and productive activities. The main consequences of this transformation are the proletarianization of Afro-peasants and in some cases their displacement.

The Afro-descendant residents have been the main population impacted by the overaccumulation of capital based on both economic and coercive practices (Harvey, 2003). This ethnic segregation of impacts amounts to a form of environmental racism that, articulated with the transition from a paternalistic state to a neoliberal state, has deepened the impoverishment and social, economic, and environmental marginalization of Afro-descendant communities (Alimonda, 2011; Martínez-Alier, 2002; Vélez-Torres, 2012). The case of the upper Cauca allows us to suggest not only that the advance of the neoliberal model impacts poor rural communities but also that violent plunder intersects with ethnic marginalization and social segregation, deepening the racial inequality that frames the contemporary construction of multicultural and postcolonial identities.

While we can understand the above facts as the muted effects of "development" in the upper Cauca during the past six decades, we can also differentiate between different types of private capital associated with different models of accumulation. The expansion of sugarcane in the plain, with a strong impact on the mountain area because of the construction of dams to regulate the flow of water and generate energy, is associated with the economic interests of an old landowning class, inheritors of the old colonial estates. The large-scale mineral extraction projects in the mountain area are associated with multinational corporate interests with heavy investment by anonymous finance capital. We

suggest that this difference in the types of equity associated with the transformation of the landscape is related to a change in the configuration of the state in the region. The type of state that dominated during the second half of the twentieth century, which benefited the expansion of sugarcane, was clearly dominated by regional elites, owners of the plain. It was a limited state consisting of landowning elites from the Spanish colony (Palacios and Safford, 2002: 267), who related to the marginal Afro-peasant sectors by way of a system of paternalistic favors, structured by concessions of floodplain land to peasants on the estate and by a history of slavery.

Currently, with the incursion of transnational capital interested in large-scale mining, there is pressure to reconfigure the state apparatus in the region, from a regional state dominated by regional elites to a state with power centralized in Bogotá that seeks to consolidate itself in the upper Cauca by creating a neo-liberal opening for international finance capital. In the upper Cauca, the anonymous character of this new type of finance capital caused the rupture of paternalistic linkages between the old local power and the Afro-descendant peasant population. Then ethnic-territorial claims emerged that found language and political space in the multicultural opening promulgated by the new constitution and Law 70. However, under the illusion of progress and the general welfare, the model of development imposed by the central government came once again to favor private interests over the collective interests of Afro-descendant communities as the state of the regional elites had done for the past five decades. Illegality and corruption are pillars of both state models, and violence and legal plunder are their mode of operation.

In the face of spatialized racism, the communities of the upper Cauca have mobilized to claim their rights, pointing to an alternative and nonhegemonic history of resistance. In this sense, what has mobilized ethnic and class identities is not just the impact of the forces of dispossession but the community response to them. Social organization and judicial mobilization have been strategies implemented by the communities in defense of their territories and their rights, processes that are taking place under constant threat to their lives and their occupation of the land. This exercise of a politicized ethnic identity is not synonymous with a utilitarian essentialism (Friedman, 2002; Hale, 2006). Instead it reveals a history of systemic marginalization in which the state has not provided these people sufficient support for their rights.

In this sense, speculating in mining rights, appropriating water for hydroelectric power, and appropriating land and water for agro-industrial use are the results of processes of dispossession that, from a political and juridical perspective, call for serious criticism of the Colombian state's actions and omissions with regard to the constitutional rights of Afro-descendant communities. Questions about the violent mechanisms that have favored the private sector are no less relevant whether they come from farmers and domestic companies or from multinational corporations. Correspondingly, demonstrating that state guarantees of ethnic and territorial rights are ineffective and contradictory has generated a strengthening of social organizations and interethnic alliances, and this shows that in confronting the geography of conflicts, a geography of variegated resistances has emerged.

NOTES

1. Landed elites who have inherited their economic and political power from colonial times. They used the labor of black slaves until abolition in 1851, and to this day it is mainly Afro-descendants who make up the workforce on the old haciendas.

2. Both the time line and the social cartography have been converted into documents that we share in the following links: http://www.nwo.nl/nwohom.nsf/pages/NWOA_78VD3R_Eng (time lines) and http://landsandrights.blog.com/files/2011/11/2011_10_Cartilla_TierrasyDerechos.pdf (social cartography).

3. In the upper Cauca Valley, the old river channels that in the rainy season again fill with water are called "old mothers"; they create wetlands that buffer the river.

4. Even currently, the sugarcane plantations in the Cauca Valley are burned before manual cutting, with the aim of facilitating the cutters' work and making the cargo lighter for transport to the mills.

5. This is a heavy floating crane that drags a metal bucket along the riverbed, collecting half a cubic meter of sand in a few minutes.

6. In La Toma there are at least four techniques for the extraction of gold: (1) traditional placer mining along the river, (2) lode mining with mallets and chisels in tunnels in the hills, also traditional, (3) more recent hydraulic mining in the hills, and, finally, (4) the recent but less practiced lode mining with explosives. In all cases, the material extracted is processed by separating the gold from the remaining sediment in wooden bowls. Depending on the availability of capital, the material extracted by lode mining may be submitted to an intermediate process in a "Californian mill" or manual cylinder to help crush it. The community does not use chemicals such as cyanide and mercury to separate the gold, so its artisanal mining can be considered completely clean.

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