Afro-Colombian Social Movements

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By some estimates, Colombia has the second largest population of Afrodescendants in Latin America, after Brazil (Sanchez and Bryan 2003). It also arguably has the most comprehensive array of legislation aimed at Afrodescendant people, covering special land titles for "black communities" (as defined by the law), ethno-education programs in schools, university places reserved for candidates from black communities, representation on committees and decision-making bodies at various levels of the local, regional and national state, a special Directorate of Black Community Affairs, and two seats in the Chamber of Representatives of the Congress reserved for candidates representing black communities.[1] Yet before the 1990s, when these laws came onto the statute books, Afro-Colombian social mobilization was not very well developed and, indeed, many academics and activists bemoaned the fact that Afro-Colombians were "invisible" in the eyes of the state and in the nation more generally. Even academic disciplines, such as history, anthropology and sociology, were said to ignore Afro-Colombians, preferring to concentrate on slavery, indigenous peoples and the poor (defined in terms of class, rather than ethnic identity). In this chapter, I will outline the background and current situation of Afro-Colombians and try to explain how the changes in their "visibility" came about (which will also involve arguing that they were not quite as invisible as often maintained).

My own experience of Colombia and Afro-Colombian people began informally in 1980, when I spent some time in the city of Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, where there is a substantial Afro-Colombian population. Between

1983 and 1998 I carried out a series of projects in rural and urban areas, using techniques of ethnographic enquiry and interviews to explore issues of identity, discrimination, political mobilization and the intersection between culture and politics. I also used the analysis of documents, especially in a study on the social history of music from the Caribbean coastal region, but my methodology has been mainly anthropological.

Background and Context

Africans were imported into Colombia from the 1520s and concentrated first in and around Cartagena, a port on the Caribbean coast, where they did domestic and agricultural labor. The main occupation of slaves, however, was gold mining and this was focused on the Pacific coastal region, and in valley zones of the provinces of Cauca and Antioquia. The Pacific coastal region was particular for having a population composed mainly of slaves, free blacks and indigenous people, with a tiny minority of whites. Interbreeding was limited and the emergence of *mestizos* (mixed people) was thus also restricted, in comparison to many other areas of Colombia where they became a majority by the end of the eighteenth century. Slavery was abolished in 1851 and the Pacific coastal region remained a poor, underdeveloped area, with little infrastructure. This history helped constitute the Pacific region as a particularly "black" region in a regionally diverse country.

Colombia is often represented as a country of regions. Typically, four main regions are said to exist. The central Andean region, with three mountainous cordilleras running north to south, separated by two impressive river valleys, encompasses the biggest cities and is the seat of political power and economic wealth. It is predominantly white and mestizo, with small groups of indigenous peoples,

especially in the higher areas. The Pacific coastal region to the west, is damp, poor, heavily forested, sparsely populated and with rather little infrastructure; it is often seen as the "black region" of the country, with a population that is about 80 per cent black and with significant indigenous groups too. The hot Caribbean coastal region to the north has some medium-sized cities and a population that includes important numbers of both Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples and a majority of mestizos, with a lot of African and indigenous heritage. Finally, the plains and jungles to the east of the Andes are famed as the territories of cowboys (on the plains or *llanos*) and indigenous peoples (in forests). This "racialized" geography - where regions have stereotypical associations with certain racial identities - is important in understanding the situation of Afro-Colombians and their processes of political mobilization. It is similar to some other Latin American countries, such as Peru, where the image of the highlands is *indio* and the coastal plains are white and mestizo, or Ecuador, where the Pacific coastal region is the "black region". Often the regions associated with black and indigenous peoples are marginalized in terms of socio-economic development and political power. Thus racial inequality becomes entwined with overall processes of national development and the mechanisms that disadvantage these peoples appear as matters of "underdevelopment", distance from the centers of wealth, lack of influence in politics, and so on. This masks the fact these mechanisms continue to marginalize not just certain regions, but certain categories of people. At the same time, the status of particular regions as the country's "black" territories also opens avenues for political mobilization and racial-ethnic identification around issues that affect those areas.

However, it is also important to realize that, whatever the broad images associated with particular regions, the Pacific coastal region is not home to the

majority of Afro-Colombians, due to its low density of population. Counting Afrodescendants in Colombia has been a difficult matter, as in Latin America generally, due to the lack of a widespread consensus about who counts as "black" (or Afro-Colombian, or whatever other terms are used). Censuses early in the twentieth century, when enumerators decided who was who, classed about 10 per cent of the national population as *negro* (Smith 1966). Later estimates varied from 4 per cent to 26 per cent - the latter figure produced by the National Planning Department in 1998 (Wade 2002: 21). In 2005, the state carried out a census with a new "ethnic" question that asked people to self-identify as one of a number of ethnic categories (which I discuss in more detail later). On the basis of this, about 4 million people, or 10.5 per cent of the national total, were categorized by the census department as *población afrocolombiana* (DANE 2006). What the results of the 2005 census also make clear is only about 20 per cent of these Afro-Colombians live in the Pacific coastal region.[2] In fact, nearly 600,000 of the self-identified Afro-Colombians in the census live in the province of Antioquia, generally famed for being one of the whitest in the country.[3] In addition, the 2005 census reinforced what had already been demonstrated (Barbary and Urrea 2004: 77-8): that 29 per cent of Afro-Colombians lived in the large cities of the interior of the country, Cali, Medellín and Bogotá, and the medium cities of the Caribbean coast, Barranquilla and Cartagena (DANE 2006: 20).

There are further important aspects of the geography of blackness in Colombia. The first concerns the so-called *raizales* (a word derived from *raíz*, meaning root), "black" people who live on the Colombian island territories of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. These people are of Anglo-Antillean origins, speak a creole English, as well as Spanish, and are mainly Protestant; according to the 2005 census, they form 57 per cent of the

island population, the rest being mostly mainland Colombians. *Raizales* have been part of Afro-Colombian mobilizations, although their concerns are not necessarily the same as those of mainland Afro-Colombians and tend to concern the defense of their culture in the face of "Colombianization" and the onslaught of tourist development. The second aspect concerns the special character of the village of Palenque de San Basilio, about 50 kilometers from Cartagena. *Palenque* was the name given to colonial settlements formed by runaway slaves or *cimarrones* (maroons), although such villages sometimes became ethnically mixed even in colonial times. They formed in many areas of Colombia and elsewhere (Price 1979), but generally lost their identity as *palenques* after abolition. Palenque de San Basilio, however, retained that identity, along with a unique creole language, and *palenqueros* have been important figures in Afro-Colombian political movements, particularly in the Caribbean coastal region, but also more widely (Cunin 2003). Overall, this uneven distribution of blackness, which nuances the stereotypical image of black coasts versus a white-mestizo interior, is important when it comes to understanding the significance of the legislation about Afro-Colombians and the nature of Afro-Colombian political mobilization.

The socio-economic conditions of Afro-Colombians present contradictory features. For example, 2005 census data showed that life expectancy for Afro-Colombian men was lower than the national average by 5.5 years for men and nearly 11 years for women. Infant mortality for Afro-Colombian girls was 44 deaths per thousand births compared to the national average of 19. Afro-Colombians suffered much higher percentages of major health problems than the overall population, while nearly 6 per cent of Afro-Colombians changed residence due to a threat to their life, compared to a national average of 4 per cent. The census also revealed that 79 per

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cent of the population of Chocó province, which occupies the northern half of the Pacific coastal region, had "unsatisfied basic needs", the highest proportion in the country, while 54 per cent of all Afro-Colombians had unsatisfied basic needs (compared to 47 per cent of non-Afro-Colombians). Comparing Afro-Colombians with non-Afro-Colombians, unemployment was higher (6 per cent versus 3 per cent) and poverty greater (10 per cent versus 7 per cent). Survey data for 2003 indicate that the provision of secondary and higher educational facilities was also worse for Afro-Colombians. On the other hand, the census showed that literacy rates for Afro-Colombians were only marginally lower than for the nation (86 per cent versus 88 per cent), and educational levels were not markedly different overall.[4] This suggests that Afro-Colombians work hard to gain an education, despite lack of facilities and services, but that their education does not benefit them as much as it does other people in terms of employment and income.[5]

Early Afro-Colombian Mobilizations

Colombia did not see the kind of early Afrodescendant mobilizations that occurred in Cuba, with the formation of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1908 (Helg 1995), or in Brazil with the emergence of a black press (Mitchell 1992) and the formation of the Frente Negra Brasileira in 1931 (Andrews 1991). However, Colombia did experience its own form of *negrismo*, or aesthetic attention to black creativity and culture: this occurred to a limited extent in literature and painting, but mostly in relation to music. Genres from the Caribbean coastal region generally identified as "black", such as *cumbia*, became popular nationally from the 1940s (Wade 2000), just as Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian music had also become national icons.

Black political mobilization started in the 1970s, with the formation of small, urban groups, often led by university students and graduates, influenced by indigenous mobilizations and, more powerfully, by overseas black movements. Figures such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela were inspirations: a group formed in 1976 in the city of Pereira was called Soweto and, in the reading group they formed, they tackled Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral in addition to US black leaders. In 1982 Soweto changed its name to Cimarrón (sub-titled The National Movement for the Human Rights of Black Communities in Colombia), invoking the figure of the rebellious runaway slave, which had already been used in Jamaica, Brazil and Haiti to signify black resistance (Wade 1995). These groups produced publications, including books, newsletters and newspapers, and they held meetings and participated in academic conferences (Wade 2009).

At the same time, and linked to such movements, academic interest in Afro-Colombians began to increase, led by anthropologist Nina de Friedemann, who started publishing on Afro-Colombian culture in the Pacific coastal region in the late 1960s, although there had been some predecessors in the field.[6] A key concern of Friedemann and these early groups was with the "invisibility" of black people in Colombia. In fact, Afro-Colombians were not quite so invisible, as reference to black people (or rather slaves) was routine in school text books, a form of stylized blackness had carved out space of a limited kind in music, and the term *negro* was used widely in Colombia to refer to people perceived as black (Wade 2000: ch. 2; Wade 2005). But blackness was certainly marginalized, trivialized and folklorized: it was also pretty much invisible in terms of the mass print media and public representations of the Colombian nation. Friedemann's project was to display the historical and contemporary presence of Africanness in Colombian culture - via the notion of

huellas de africanía (traces of Africanness), which she developed with fellow anthropologist Jaime Arocha - and highlight the distinctiveness of Afro-Colombian cultural forms in the context of Colombian popular culture. She was also concerned with racism, principally in terms of the denial and marginalization of blackness, but also in terms of discrimination against Afro-Colombian communities (Friedemann 1976; Friedemann and Arocha 1986).

Afro-Colombian organizations at this time, such as the Centre for the Investigation and Development of Black Culture, led by Amir Smith Córdoba, and Cimarrón, led by Juan de Dios Mosquera - both men based in cities of the interior of the country, having migrated from the Pacific coastal region - shared these concerns and also spear-headed a consciousness-raising movement, which aimed to confront a number of problems.[7] As these leaders saw it, too many "black" people denied their own blackness, perhaps preferring not to identify in relation to ethnicity or race, perhaps trying to avoid the perceived stigma of blackness and of Africa; too many refused to recognize that they were "black", claiming they were mestizos, perhaps brown-skinned, but not "black"; too many were ignorant of black history and even denied that racism affected Afro-Colombians. These movements thus addressed invisibility and denial by publishing and disseminating information about Afro-Colombians' role in history and society, but they also had a perspective that included racism in urban life. In contrast, the academics tended to focus more on Afro-Colombian history and culture, rooted in the Pacific coastal region, and to a lesser extent the Caribbean coastal region (where Palenque de San Basilio took pride of place).

Other organizations existed at this time and their varied nature can be illustrated by two examples. The Corporación de Negritudes in Medellín mainly

provided services and education for female domestic service workers from the Pacific coastal region, but also aimed to foster black identity by holding classes on black history and culture for the young women. The Chocoano Action Committee, also in Medellín, was an association of more middle-class migrants from Chocó, who participated in the party political networks of their home province. They pursued a regionalist project that sought to enhance the political influence of Chocó - the only *departamento* (province) with a majority black population that, since 1947 when it gained departmental status, had been able to elect a senator to Congress - as well as their own political ambitions. Although blackness was a central aspect of Chocoano identity, this Committee was only tangentially concerned with promoting something called black identity (Wade 1993: 327-33).

1990s' Reform, the Afro-Colombian Movement and Multiculturalism

In the 1991, Colombia, like many other countries in Latin America around this time, underwent a constitutional reform, which included an apparently dramatic shift towards official multiculturalism (Van Cott 2000; Sieder 2002). The new Constitution declared it would "recognize and protect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation" (Article 7). The reasons behind this region-wide shift are varied and include a desire by the state to appear more in line with international criteria of modern, liberal democracies, the growing power of indigenous and ethnic rights movements worldwide and, in the Colombian case, an attempt to address issue of violence and dissent by bringing guerrilla forces into the process of reform. Colombia was unusual because of the inclusion in the new Constitution of a Transitory Article that promised land titles for "black communities" in the Pacific coastal region - for reasons I will explore below. This Article was followed by Law 70 of 1993, and further decrees and

laws, that consolidated this opening and provided for the kind of rights and representation outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

This process of change had a key feature. The Constituent Assembly had no Afro-Colombian elected representative, despite several candidates having stood for election. In the Pacific coastal region, a number of organizations had emerged in the 1980s, often initiated by the Catholic Church and usually directed towards helping peasant farmers - for example, ACIA, the Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato River, formed in 1984. Some of these organizations had allied with local indigenous groups - also supported by the Church, which had much more experience in dealing with indigenous matters - and thus began to fit themselves into a mold shaped by the concept of *indígena*. Indigenous people already had land reserves, some of them of colonial antiquity, others a result of more recent negotiations with the state. Indigenous peoples had a particular status vis-à-vis the state, that of small, vulnerable and protected ethnic minority, living mainly in rather peripheral zones of the country. In the Constituent Assembly, it was no accident that an Emberá indigenous leader, Francisco Rojas Birry, represented an alliance of Afro-indigenous interests, linked to the Pacific coastal region. Any consideration of Afro-Colombian matters was a struggle in the Assembly; most representatives initially rejected the idea that black people in Colombia could be considered an "ethnic group". Faced with the possibility that petitions to recognize Afro-Colombians might go unheeded, there was lobbying by Rojas Birry and a number of academics, backed by Afro-Colombian mobilizations that included a telegram campaign to Constituent Assembly delegates, the occupation of government offices and the Cathedral in Quibdó (Chocó) in May 1991, and of the Haitian embassy in Bogotá.[8] At the last minute, the Transitory Article was included.

Law 70, when it emerged, not surprisingly reflected this regional and ethnic bias. It indigenized, regionalized and ruralized the question of blackness in Colombia. Although it included a host of measures and also defined black communities in Colombia as an ethnic group, the law was essentially about the provision of land titles to rural, riverine, black communities in the Pacific coastal region, communities defined in terms of their kinship links, their rootedness in the land and their "traditional production practices". This definition fitted an indigenist mold.

After the 1991 reform, the initial impetus was to make sure the Transitory Article became law and Afro-Colombian organizations multiplied, particularly in the Pacific region, but also elsewhere. Leaders from Palenque de San Basilio, for example, were influential in negotiations leading up to Law 70, but, perhaps because of the status of Palenque as an old, well-delimited and rural community (albeit having community members who had migrated to cities all over the Caribbean coastal region), this did not move Law 70 away from the figure of the "black community". The most influential and durable organization to emerge, the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), was decidedly centered on land titling and Pacific in its regional orientation. Cimarrón, as an urban organization based in Bogotá, was marginalized and had to work hard to re-invent networks in the rural Pacific region.

By the mid 1990s, blackness in Colombia had a profile that privileged the ethnic and distinctiveness of a specific region. The juridical and conceptual construct of the *comunidad negra* implied "the abandonment of the socio-political specificities" of actual black communities in the Pacific region (Hoffmann 2004: 218): for example, the variety of economic activities - which included fishing, mining, logging, hunting, agriculture, trading, all with more or less use of modern technologies - was hidden in the blanket reference to "traditional production practices". If this was true for the

Pacific region, it was even more the case for Colombia generally: the huge variety of contexts in which Afro-Colombians lived was masked in the name of a more singular and homogeneous black ethnic identity.

The emergence of Law 70 and its particular ethno-cultural character were the outcome of a complex set of interactions between academics and Afro-Colombian organizations and the state, not to mention the Church and indigenous organizations (Wade 2009). Colombian academics such as Arocha and Friedemann had established Afro-Colombian anthropology and defined it as the study of cultural difference, above all in the Pacific region: they both participated in discussions in the Constituent Assembly. Afro-Colombian organizations were already burgeoning in the Pacific region, fighting for land rights in alliance with indigenous groups and supported by the Church with its Liberation Theology-inspired concern for oppressed peoples. Meanwhile, urban black organizations of the interior, fired by transnational black movements, struggled for support and resources.

For its part, the state was not necessarily rigidly opposed to either Afro-Colombian or indigenous rights, as long as these could be controlled. A number of authors argue that Law 70, and multiculturalist policies more generally, actually fit with neo-liberalizing projects that seek to create effective governance and the free circulation of goods and people, while still cutting back on direct state investment. Such policies bring actors in previously marginal areas into a direct relationship with the state (in this case as land-holders), while also making them responsible for their own management (community members have to organize their land claim and then manage the collective title). Meanwhile, capitalist development of the area can continue outside the collectively titled areas and can even access community labor and resources more freely. For example, Oslender (2002) gives the example of a

commercial firm exporting *palmitos* (edible palm hearts) to Europe, which sponsored a collective land title claim in the southern Pacific region and continued its operations, using local community labour.[9] In addition, attention was suddenly paid to the immense biodiversity of the Pacific region: this was a resource to be protected for posterity (but also for future exploitation by a conservationist form of development) and the state, Afro-Colombian communities, and international development agencies agreed on the importance of sustaining biodiversity. Although this apparent consensus did not mean they necessarily understood this agenda in the same way - e.g. biodiversity as a development resource versus biodiversity as the basis for a local lifestyle - *comunidades negras* could figure, alongside indigenous communities, as guardians of the environment (Escobar 1997; Escobar 2008).

Thus, the state could see advantages in Law 70 and the recognition of (regional) blackness: it helped open up the resource-rich but isolated Pacific region to development, while creating mechanisms that could enhance governance of the region and its communities. The Law also reinforced the liberal, democratic credentials of the Colombian state in the international arena. The state was, however, predisposed to assimilate the new political presence of blackness to the more familiar figure of ethnic indigenousness when considering matters of governance (Hooker 2005). This meant that small, bounded, rural black communities fitted into an existing mold of state–minority relations and helped keep these relations within controllable bounds (Anderson 2007).

In this overall scenario, the issue of racism, while it by no means disappeared, became more muted. Indeed, the PCN argued that "presenting the situation of Afro-Colombian communities in terms of racial discrimination has little audience" (Pedrosa 1996: 251, my translation). The struggle was to protect a vulnerable, poor minority by

giving its people land rights that recognized their historical, cultural difference (e.g. their collective production practices). The reason for their poverty was neglect and indifference, and, while these could be linked to racism, this did not occupy center stage. Many black people in Colombia - as elsewhere in Latin America - tended to deny that racism was a problem for them, citing poverty as the key issue and avoiding the idea that their blackness might be a stigma (Wade 1993: ch. 14; Sheriff 2001: ch. 3; Burdick 1998: 5). Phrasing the struggle primarily in terms of racism was thus difficult.

Afro-Colombian organization was not, however, entirely limited to the Pacific coastal region. In 1997, for example, I carried out a study in the city of Cali that focused on the intersection of politics and musical expression. Situated only a couple of hours (on today's roads) from the Pacific coast and located near areas of historically dense Afro-Colombian population such as Puerto Tejada and the towns of the northern Cauca province, Cali has long had a substantial black presence, reinforced in the last two decades by large migrations from the Pacific coastal region. According to 2005 census figures, Afro-Colombians were 26 per cent of the city's population.[10] I found that there were a number of different Afro-Colombian organizations in operation (Wade 1999). Some of them were basically groups of dancers and rap musicians, but many of the young people in them showed an awareness of issues of black identity and racism that made it impossible to ignore the political dimensions of these organizations. A local black barbershop, for example, was an enterprise linked to fashion and consumption, but it also acted as a public expression of Afro-Colombian identity - with Rastafarian colors, a map of Africa and posters of Michael Jordan and Bob Marley on display - and a source of income for young black activists involved in a local community organization and rap crew called

Ashanty. Ashanty and other similar groups were explicitly political, even if their practical activities were centered around music and dance. They adopted a discourse of black pride and anti-racism, while they worked to promote hip-hop culture as an expression of these ideas, and as a set of performance and organizational skills, which could be valuable social capital for young black people.

Other organizations were formal NGOs, usually with development and consciousness-raising agendas for Afro-Colombians, similar to Cimarrón or PCN, albeit often smaller and more ephemeral. And there also existed a local branch of a national political party called Movimiento Nacional de Comunidades Negras, which sought to get Afro-Colombian candidates elected to government office. Complex networks ran through this diversity and into the Church and local state. For example, Ashanty negotiated for funding with the recently formed "Negritudes" division of Cali's city council, with the Catholic Church, with an international aid NGO, and also with a national beer company, which helped fund a hip-hop event. Another group, focusing more on "folkloric" dance from the Pacific region and calling itself a "cultural youth association", was led by an Afro-Colombian man who had close links to politicians in the Movimiento Nacional de Comunidades Negras, and organized Afro-Colombian ethno-education projects, covering everything from Law 70 to black hairstyles. A third group was funded in part by an oil company which was developing a gas pipeline in the region: the funds were used for workshops on Law 70 and citizenship, low-income housing projects, research projects and so on. This gives some sense of the range of activities and networks that make up a "social movement".

In the Caribbean coastal region, there were also significant processes of organizing that nuanced the association between blackness and the Pacific coast, even if Afro-Colombian organizations centered on Cartagena, and to some extent in the

Caribbean coastal region as a whole, have been dominated by leaders from Palenque de San Basilio - a village that fits well the image of a *comunidad negra* (Cunin 2003; Cunin 2000). In one case, Cimarrón started a legal campaign to have a "black community", as defined by the law, recognized in the city of Santa Marta, allowing its representatives to sit on city council committees. After a long judicial battle, in which the presence of a black community was denied, it was recognized by a 1996 decision of the Constitutional Court (Wade 2002: 18). This was significant because it broke with the association between the legal category *comunidad negra* and the Pacific region - a possibility foreseen in Transitory Article 55, which said its provisions could apply to other regions of the country with "similar conditions" to those of the Pacific region.

In short, while the Pacific coastal region and issues of cultural difference associated with Afro-Colombians as an "ethnic group" dominated the panorama of Afro-Colombian social movements in the wake of Law 70, muting questions of racism, by the late 1990s there were already some departures from this scenario, which drew both on pre-1991 Afro-Colombian organization and on the fact that Law 70, despite its focus on the Pacific coastal region, had opened up a more public space for blackness than had existed previously.

Violence, Displacement and Race

The gains of the 1990s, whatever their limits, have been put at severe risk by the waves of violence that have shattered the social fabric of the Pacific coastal region. From the late 1990s, conflicts between guerrilla forces, the army and right-wing paramilitaries (often colluding with the army) have dominated the area, moving from Chocó province in the north towards the south (Wouters 2001). These complex conflicts, which affect large areas of Colombia, are driven by many forces. A key factor is the relative

weakness of the Colombian state, which is unable to control portions of the national territory, and has sought to do so in part via the US-funded Plan Colombia, involving development aid but also military assistance.[11] Another factor is the convenience for the state of the existence of paramilitaries, who carry out state violence "by proxy" (Sanford 2004). Also vital are the pervasive effects of the drug trade, which helps fund guerrillas, paramilitaries and, indirectly, the state and sustains the self-propelling character of the violence. Lastly, the violence, especially by paramilitaries, "cleanses" tracts of land of people and communities, leaving them open for further capitalist developments, especially African palm oil plantations, but also industrial shrimp farming and mining (Escobar 2003; Oslender 2007; Escobar 2008; Restrepo and Rojas 2004).

Violence has undermined the region's collective land titles, agendas of sustaining biodiversity and diverse local projects, from women's shellfish-collecting cooperatives to small enterprises for marketing forest products. Huge numbers of Afro-Colombians (and indigenous people) have been displaced into, first, the local cities of Buenaventura, Tumaco and Quibdó and, then, into cities of the interior. According to the Colombian NGO, CODHES (Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy), 4.6 million Colombians were forced from their homes between 1985 and 2008, with high points of about 400,000 individuals a year in 2002 and 2008.[12] Of these people, it is estimated by CODHES that about 23 per cent are Afro-Colombians, more than double their proportion in the total population in the 2005 census. About 12 per cent of all Afro-Colombians are classified as displaced persons. The state estimates that in 2000-2002, the rate of displacement of Afro-Colombians was nearly twice that of non-Afro-Colombians. In the port of Buenaventura, inundated with Afro-Colombian *desplazados* (displaced people), CODHES states that there is effectively an

"ethnocide" of young Afro-Colombians, with 382 murders in 2007, giving a rate of 112 murders per 100,000 (compared to 38 for Colombia as a whole).[13]

Afro-Colombian organization in the Pacific region continues despite these fearful set-backs and much of the emphasis is now on human rights, violence and displacement, with a corresponding focus on youth (who figure largely among the displaced and those killed by violence). The scenario is diverse and complex, with organizations ranging from small income-generating cooperatives to the PCN, which continues to be one of the most influential Afro-Colombian organizations, with leaders of international stature such as Carlos Rosero, who ran unsuccessfully for the Constituent Assembly in 1991, became a lynch-pin for the PCN and now participates in a number of transnational networks (which included a 2007 tour of US, meeting members of Congress). International bodies ranging from the World Bank, through the US Congressional Black Caucus to the Catholic Church have an interest in and/or channel funds to the region. Of the multiple branches of the Colombian government, some support a range of local endeavors, including Afro-Colombian organizations, while other branches support mega-development projects, military incursions, and the contracting of international private security companies to assist with the implementation of Plan Colombia projects, such as crop-spraying (Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo 2008).

Meanwhile, horizons of Afro-Colombian movements have broadened a little more since the late 1990s. While the vast majority of the 132 collective land titles handed out to black communities by 2005 were in the Pacific coastal region, a few small territories have been titled in riverine areas of Antioquia province.[14] Land is a major concern for many Afro-Colombians outside the Pacific coastal region: activists from around Cartagena, for example, are concerned about the security of their land ownership

- often not fully legalized, despite a long history of privatization of land - and they face gradual dislocation by tourist and other capitalist ventures. While Afro-Colombian organizations in the area work to promote black consciousness and culture, they also seek to protect human rights for Afro-Colombians, including rights to land. Organizations put varying emphases on issues of identity and matters of material livelihood, but, as in Cali, the two aspects tend to intertwine.

Another example of geographical expansion beyond the Pacific region is education. Provisions heralded in Law 70 were followed up by Decree 1627 of 1996, which created mechanisms for university fee exemptions for students from Afro-Colombian communities. The Ministry of the Interior signed agreements with a number of universities which gave about 400 fee-exempt places nationwide to such students between 1997 and 2001. The government entity that helps Colombian students study abroad reportedly helped 2,550 Afro-Colombian students between 1996 and 2000 (DNP 2002: 6). Such initiatives have been spreading, without getting close to the quota systems in place in some Brazilian universities (Htun 2004). For example, in 2009, the University of San Buenaventura de Cartagena signed an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior to provide fee discounts to Afro-Colombian students.[15] These small measures indicate an openness to thinking about blackness on a national, rather than a purely regional, level.

This incipient shift is also evident in the 2005 census. An "ethnic question" was first tried in the 1993 census and was a dismal failure. It asked people to identify as a member of a "black community" and then name the community; the question was based on the very recent concept of the *comunidad negra* as a bounded entity in the Pacific region. Only 1.5 per cent of people identified as such. Prior to the 2005 census, there were intensive discussions, some of them in conferences funded by the

World Bank, about how to improve the question, with participation from government census officials, academics, and black organizations. The 2005 ethnic question asked people to identify as a) *raizal*, b) *palenquero*, or c) *negro(a), mulato(a), afrocolombiano(a) o afrodescendiente* (or indigenous or Rom - or none of the above). Results were reported in a way that lumped the three "black" categories into a single Afro-Colombian one. The figure of 10.5 per cent was criticized as an under-count by Afro-Colombian organizations, which had lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion in the above list of the category *moreno* (brown), a term widely used to describe self and others across a broad range of racialized phenotypes. *Negro* still carries a stigma for some people and may be thought to signify a person who is very African-looking. *Mulato* is not a term commonly heard in Colombia, while *afrocolombiano* and *afrodescendiente*, although increasingly apparent, are still linked to an intellectual and activist discourse. Actual numbers aside, the significant thing was the institutionalization by the state of a category of blackness that ran counter to the category of the *comunidad negra*, based in the Pacific coastal region, which the state had worked hard to construct and confine within a region. At this stage, it is difficult to say what impact such an institutional shift has on everyday identifications, but censuses are important tools and the categories they deploy get used extensively in the public domain, where they become more consolidated (Nobles 2000).

Changes are also evident in the arena of electoral politics. There has long been a handful of Afro-Colombian members of congress - partly because Chocó was granted the status of *departamento* in 1947 - and Law 70 provided for two Representatives to be elected to the Chamber of Deputies by a special electoral constituency of black communities. In 2007, these two - one an ex-sporting champion with electoral support from the Pacific coast, the other a career politician elected by

voters in the Caribbean coastal province of Bolívar - made up part of a short-lived

Bancada Parlamentaria Afrocolombiana (a black caucus) with seven other politicians,

including Piedad Córdoba, known to support the social inclusion of minorities,

including Afro-Colombians.[16] Congress has more Afro-Colombian members than

ever (13 over the 2006-2010 congressional period), although they vary in their

explicit support of Afro-Colombian rights.[17] However, several of these politicians

have been plagued by charges of corruption and it is difficult to detect a real driver for

change from this direction. Afro-Colombian electoral politics is also beset by

fragmentation. In the Congressional elections held in March 2010, there were a total

of 169 candidates, allied to 67 separate political parties, competing for the two

Representatives' seats reserved for Afro-Colombian communities in the Chamber of

Deputies. In contrast, the total number of candidates for the special electoral

constituency seats for indigenous communities in both Senate and Chamber was only

20, allied to only 5 parties.[18] Agudelo (2005) argues that electoral politics in the

Pacific region may trade on ideas of black identity, but it continues to thrive on old-

style clientelism and pork-barrel politics. Meanwhile, President Uribe appointed Afro-

Colombian academic Paula Moreno (who had researched biodiversity management in

the Pacific coastal region) as Minister of Culture in 2007 (until 2010) in a move that

was seen by some as a bid to gain the support of the US Congressional Black Caucus

for the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Finally, there appears to be a (slightly) greater interest in questions of racism,

partly in the wake of the 2001 Durban conference on racism. The PCN, which in

1996, saw racism as theme with little audience now has as one of its aims the struggle

against racism and has a link to the Racial Discrimination Observatory, established at

a private university in 2007 to monitor racism, mainly by publishing statistical

information on racial inequality and publicizing incidents of racism.[19] Hoffmann (2004: 221) also notes "a reorientation of the ethnic debate towards the anti-discrimination struggle". In May 2009, there was the first National Campaign Against Racism, supported by the Vice-President, who presented the recommendations of the Inter-Sectoral Commission for the Advancement of the Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, and Raizal Population that he had been heading up: the first recommendation was to combat racism at a national level.[20] One may doubt the efficacy of such government pronouncements, but they do indicate a shift in focus. Interestingly, Meertens (2009) looks at cases of *tutelas* (legal actions brought by citizens in defense of their constitutional rights) which have challenged everyday racial discrimination. For example, a young woman alleged she was denied entry to a music club because she was black: the Constitutional Court found in her favor.

The reasons for this recent shift are linked to various factors: a growing transnational interest in "Afro-Latins" and Afrodescendants - e.g. from the World Bank, the United Nations, and the US Congressional Black Caucus; the increasing organization of Afro-Colombians outside the Pacific region, spurred by Law 70; the use by activists of judicial instruments, such as Law 70, to push the boundaries of the law itself (for example, by claiming the existence of a "black community" in Santa Marta); the gradual consolidation of legislation that developed aspects of Law 70, such as educational opportunities for Afro-Colombians, in a way that extends beyond the Pacific region; and shifts in academic emphasis towards racism and urban Afro-Colombians (e.g. Barbary and Urrea 2004).

Conclusion

Colombia pre-1991 was dominated by the ideology of *mestizaje*: it was a mestizo country, with black and indigenous populations that were supposedly on the road to a mixed, integrated modernity. Black and indigenous people were not invisible - indeed their presence, especially in under-developed areas, was necessary to confirm the supposed superiority and modernity of the central image of the whitened mestizo nation. But they certainly occupied a lowly place in the nation's social and cultural hierarchies, albeit certain powers were attributed to them, with regard to music, dance, magic, healing and physical prowess. Ideologies and practices of *mestizaje* allowed the simultaneous existence of racism and non-racism. Afro-Colombians could be both excluded and included: inter-racial unions, for example, could both undo racial hierarchy (by crossing racial difference and producing more mixed children) and express it (through observers' assumptions that the darker partner was motivated by a desire to whiten). This simultaneity of inclusion and exclusion generated ambiguity that masked racism.

Since 1991, black and indigenous peoples have been assigned - and have fought for - a place in the legislation. Affirmative actions of various kinds have been designed to right previous wrongs. This does not mean that *mestizaje* and all it implies has disappeared - far from it, it is still a powerful force in everyday life. But the differences of race and ethnicity - usually glossed as ethnicity alone by the state, which prefers to avoid reference to "race" - are now much clearer and more public. *Mestizaje* is about the integration and modernization of the nation, but it also relies on a discourse about private, domestic matters - sexual relationships between men and women. Multiculturalist policies place racial and ethnic difference more firmly in the public domain and challenge the ambiguities and masking that *mestizaje* generates.

What we see, however, is that, alongside the inclusions of multiculturalism (some of them more apparent than real), exclusions continue. They persist in familiar ways, but also now in much more violent forms: murder, displacement, terror. It seems that the making public of difference, and its inscription in the law, has brought with it more drastic and violent forms of disciplining difference.

In this light, it is unclear what the implications will be of the incipient shift from the almost exclusive focus on the Pacific coastal region towards a more encompassing notion of Afro-Colombianness, in which blackness begins to have a higher profile in civic life in general. The Pacific coastal has suffered terrible violence and it continues to be a place where radical forms of cultural difference and alternative notions of development and modernity are being elaborated (Escobar 2008). It is also a place where black and indigenous social movements overlap in ways that challenge the divide, of colonial origin, between "black" and "indigenous" and generate inter-ethnic alliances, which, although not problem-free, have the potential to mount combined challenges to violence and exclusion (Hale, Gurdián and Gordon 2003; cf. French 2009). If the difference of blackness is institutionalized more deeply into Colombian civic society, such violence may subside, but probably at the cost of the alternative life-forms (and lives) of the people of the Pacific coastal region.

Notes

[1] Representatives of black communities are included in the INCODER (Colombian Institute of Rural Development), the Ministry of Mines, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Education, among others. The Dirección de Asuntos para Comunidades Negras, Afrocolombianas, Raizales y Palenqueras (Directorate of Affairs for Black, Afrocolombian, Raizal and Palenque Communities) is a dependency of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice.

[2] See the Excel file at

http://www.dane.gov.co/files/etnicos/taller/terri_colectivos_cnegras.xls, accessed 6 September 2010.

[3] This is partly because Antioquia has a Caribbean coastline, but even so, there are more "blacks" in Antioquia than in the province of Bolívar, generally considered by Colombians as one of the "blacker" provinces and the capital city of which is Cartagena, also usually seen as quite a "black" city.

[4] Afro-Colombians with no education = 13 per cent (cf. 10 per cent nationally); with basic secondary = 20 per cent (cf. 19 per cent nationally); with professional qualifications = 4 per cent (cf. 7 per cent nationally). Afro-Colombians have 6.7 years of schooling on average (cf. 8.2 for non-Afro-Colombians). This picture varies a bit if one looks at specific municipalities in the Pacific coastal region. Thus for Tumaco, Afro-Colombians with no education = 16 per cent; with basic secondary = 16 per cent; with professional qualifications = 2 per cent.

[5] For the 2005 census data, see DANE (N.d-a, N.d-b), Vicepresidencia (2009); for the 2003 survey data, see Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP (2004). The municipal education data cited in note 4 come from the Excel file at

http://www.dane.gov.co/files/etnicos/taller/terri_colectivos_cnegras.xls, accessed 6 September 2010. See also the website of the Observatorio de Discriminación Racial, which has useful data on racial inequality: http://odr.uniandes.edu.co/cifras/cifraspp.html, accessed 6 September 2010.

[6] A handful of writers, including students of Melville Herskovits and some folklorists, had published studies: see Wade (1993).

[7] Cimarrón's full title is now Movimiento Nacional Cimarrón, see http://www.cimarronracismo.org/.

[8] See Centro del Pastoral Afrocolombiana (2003).

[9] See Gros (1997), Hale (2005), and Speed (2005) for general arguments about what Hale calls "multicultural neoliberalism". See Wade (2002) on the Pacific coastal region.

[10] See http://odr.uniandes.edu.co/pdfs/Cifras/composicionmunicipal.pdf, accessed 6 September 2010.

[11] Plan Colombia was initiated in 1998, with US backing, as broad development package, but centered on an anti-narcotics project, seeking to eliminate and replace the cultivation and production of narcotics, which often took place in areas where state presence was weak. The Pacific coastal region has felt the effects of Plan Colombia, both in terms of the expansion of African palm oil plantations and because both guerrilla and paramilitary forces have imposed the cultivation of coca leaf in the area.

[12] See CODHES bulletin, *Víctimas emergentes*, April 2009, http://www.codhes.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=61&Itemid=50 (accessed 6 September 2010)

[13] See CODHES, "Afrocolombianos desplazados, un drama sin tregua"

http://www.codhes.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=157&Itemid=1 (accessed 6 September 2010). See also Vicepresidencia (2009).

[14] See the Excel document cited in note 2 and the map Resguardos Indígenas y Títulos Colectivos de Comunidades Negras at

http://sigotn.igac.gov.co/sigotn/PDF/SIGOT_SocResguardos_Nal.pdf, accessed 6 September 2010. These territories are on the borders of Zaragoza, Anorí and Segovia municipalities on the River Porce, in Yondó municipality near the River Magdalena, and in Sopetrán municipality on the River Cauca - all a long way from the Pacific coastal region. See also DANE (2006: 19-20).

[15] Reported at

http://www.mij.gov.co/eContent/newsdetailmore.asp?id=3670&idcompany=2.

[16] Formed in about 2006, by 2010 the Bancada Afrocolombiana was under investigation for irregularities.

[17] "Sólo dos congresistas afros son considerados 'Visibles'" by Luis Bravo,

http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoBlog.aspx?IdBlg=51&IdEnt=2295, accessed 6 September 2010

[18] For the list of candiates, see

http://www.registraduria.gov.co/Informacion/elec_2010_cand.htm. For the voting results, see http://www.registraduria.gov.co/elec2010/resultados.htm, both accessed 06 September 2010.

[19] See the PCN website, http://www.renacientes.org/ (accessed 6 September 2010). See also the Observatory site, http://odr.uniandes.edu.co/ (accessed 6 September 2010).

[20] See

http://www.mij.gov.co/econtent/library/documents/DocNewsNo3600DocumentNo17

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