Austin Zeiderman

Submergence: precarious politics in Colombia's future port-city

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Submergence
Precarious Politics in Colombia's Future Port-City

Austin Zeiderman
Department of Geography and Environment
London School of Economics and Political Science

This article examines popular politics under precarious conditions in the rapidly expanding port-city of Buenaventura on Colombia's Pacific coast. It begins by identifying the intersecting economic, ecological, and political forces contributing to the precarity of life in Buenaventura's intertidal zone. Focusing on conflicts over land in the waterfront settlements of Bajamar (meaning "low-tide"), it then describes the efforts of Afro-Colombian settlers and activists to defend their territories against threats of violence and displacement. In doing so, they must navigate historical legacies of ethno-racial politics as well as formations of liberal governance and their multicultural and biopolitical logics of vulnerability and protection. The socio-material conditions of the intertidal zone, and in particular the figure of *submergence*, are used to illuminate the forms of political life in Colombia's future port-city. The struggles of Afro-Colombians to contest violent dispossession in Buenaventura reflect the racialized politics of precarity under late liberalism.

"Beautiful seaport, my Buenaventura, where the pure breeze always blows."

Petronio Álvarez, "Mi Buenaventura," 1931

Thus begins a song written in 1931 by Petronio Álvarez, a machinist on the railroad running inland from the Pacific coast of Colombia, in honor of his native city. Entitled "My Buenaventura," it gained popularity throughout the country following its 1952 release by a prominent record label, and it remains the hymn of the southern Pacific region to this day. The song is a *currulao*—the musical style closely associated with Colombians of African descent who were brought as slaves to mine for gold during the colonial period, and who now predominate in this part of the country. Most notably, it evokes two key characteristics of the city to which it pays homage.

First, Álvarez's lyrics glorify the fact that Buenaventura, ever since it was founded by Spanish explorers in 1540, and especially after the Panama Canal opened in 1914, has been first and foremost a port—an aperture through which people, goods, and wealth could pass—rather than a permanent settlement in its own right (Suárez Reyes 2010:2491). Second, "My Buenaventura" invokes an intimate, even erotic partnership between land and sea: "You lovely port, surrounded by the sea," it swoons; "sparkling waves come and kiss you." Children learning to play the *marimba* still sing the emblematic song. But the two relationships it conjures up—between port and city; between land and sea—are not nearly as harmonious as they once were in Álvarez's lyrical imagination.

Buenaventura is still known colloquially as "el Puerto," perhaps more fittingly now that it moves a greater volume of merchandise than anywhere else in Colombia. But for many this nickname now signifies an indictment of the unequal, conflictual relationship between the city and the port rather than a celebration of the latter's mounting importance to the national economy. The port generates a limited amount of employment in Buenaventura, mostly for workers brought in from elsewhere, and the city is by far Colombia's poorest and least developed (Ministerio de Trabajo 2012). Buenaventura has a 30% unemployment rate, 80% of its inhabitants live below the poverty line, 65% of households do not have a sewage system, 45% lack potable water, and life expectancy is 51 years, 11 less than the national average (Nicholls and Sánchez-Garzoli 2011:4). "It's a massive port with an inconsequential city attached to it," Manuel, a teacher, told me. "Nothing stays here and nothing gets invested; everything just moves through on its way to somewhere else. This is the history of Buenaventura, and it continues right up to the present," he said. "The white and *mestizo* elite who control and benefit from the port make sure the city and its people get the bare minimum; they invest only what's necessary for their goods to make it up to Cali or Bogotá. That's it. We call it *un puerto-ciudad*, not *una ciudad-puerto*," he quipped, inverting the usual sequence of the terms "port" and "city" in Spanish.

Buenaventura's sole vocation as a seaport is due not only to the containers of televisions, shoes, and cars entering the bay, or to the sacks of coffee and sugar leaving it; in recent years, it has become a primary outlet for drug shipments from Colombia to the rest of the world. Vital for trade, both legal and illegal, waterfront territories in and around Buenaventura are exceedingly valuable and ferociously fought over by rival

militias, who alternate between decimating each other's ranks and terrorizing the local population. The intertidal zone—the land adjacent to the sea that is periodically submerged—has endured repeated acts of violence and dispossession, which have displaced thousands from their homes, and everyday life there is highly precarious. Sparkling waves do still come and kiss the shores of this beautiful seaport, but they now sometimes carry with them a dead body or two, often dismembered or decapitated before being dumped offshore.

The relationship between the port and the city, between land and sea, is at the heart of the territorial conflicts ravaging Buenaventura. These conflicts are fueled by three intersecting forces, which contribute to the precarity of life in the city's seaside settlements and to the displacement of their inhabitants: forecasts of free trade and economic development motivate plans for turning Buenaventura into a "world-class" port; projections of increased flood risk associated with climate change underpin relocation programs in zones of pronounced vulnerability; and competition for control over strategically important waterfront areas leads to violent clashes between criminal gangs and state security forces. These three forces—port expansion, climate change adaptation, and paramilitary violence—converge on the seaside shantytown of Bajamar (meaning "low-tide") built and inhabited by Afro-Colombian settlers. There activists and residents struggle to defend their territories against the threat of displacement. Focusing on territorial conflicts in the waterfront settlements of Bajamar, this article uses socio-material conditions of the intertidal zone, and in particular the figure of *submergence*, to illuminate precarious forms of political life in Colombia's future port-city.[1]

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The structure of the argument is as follows. The first section discusses the article's conceptual problematic, which is how to understand popular politics under conditions of protracted precarity. Drawing critiques of liberal multiculturalism, race, and colonialism into conversation with political ecology and science and technology studies, it proposes "submergence" as an analytical device. Designating the state of being inundated by a relative rise in water levels, submergence draws our attention to the socio-material relationship between people and the environment in the waterfront settlements of Buenaventura's intertidal zone. In addition to this more literal meaning, submergence also points to forms of cultural and political practice that are forced or resigned to float above and below the surface or move in and out of sight. The second section then discusses what makes submergence strategic, even necessary, as a form of popular politics by identifying the intersecting economic, ecological, and political forces contributing to the precarity of life in Buenaventura's intertidal zone. It is followed by a third section that concentrates on the self-built settlements of Bajamar, where the convergence of these forces generates recurrent waves of violence and displacement. The fourth section then shows how Afro-Colombian settlers and activists are positioned, and position themselves, as legal and political subjects: that is, how their efforts to resist dispossession are both enabled and constrained by historical legacies of ethno-racial politics as well as multicultural and biopolitical logics of liberal governance. In conclusion, "submergent politics" is elaborated as a way to make sense of the forms of political life specific to the territorial conflicts underway in Colombia's future port-city as well as those unfolding under similar circumstances in other parts of the world.

Precarious Politics in the Intertidal Zone

The following analysis of precarious forms of political life departs from a concern for the limits of liberalism in both theory and practice. Elizabeth Povinelli defines "late liberalism" as a "formation of power" that fuses neoliberalism and multiculturalism, and that emerged in the 1960s in response to widespread crises of political, economic, and social legitimacy (2013a:30-31).[2] Povinelli contends that liberal governance "solved these legitimacy crises by arguing that the population of the nation-state would be *secured against harm* if it were opened to the *precarious character of life as difference*" (2013a:31, my emphasis). In contrast to classical theories of liberalism centered on universal freedom of the autonomous individual, liberal governance would prioritize the protection of collective forms of life deemed culturally and economically valuable while rendering others increasingly precarious (Povinelli 2011). "Precarity" would eventually become a defining characteristic of late-liberal life, labor, ecology, and citizenship (Butler 2004; Bear and Mathur 2015; Allison 2013; Berlant 2011; Weston 2012). By analyzing popular responses to violence, displacement, and dispossession in Buenaventura's waterfront settlements, this article considers how precarious forms of political life navigate formations of liberal governance and their logics of vulnerability and protection.

In Colombia, as elsewhere, liberal governance is entangled with the ethno-racial politics of recognition accompanying state multiculturalism (Escobar 2008; Jackson 2007; Rappaport 2005; Wade 1993). As security saturates the realm of the political (Rojas 2009), rights and citizenship are often predicted on both multicultural *and* biopolitical rationalities of rule (Zeiderman 2013). But the politics of life in Colombia is

also a politics of death (Ballvé 2013), and a deeply racialized one (Foucault 2003; Mbembe 2003). The capacity of certain forms of life to survive, endure, or flourish—while others are abandoned, extinguished, or left to go extinct—is distributed unevenly according to racial regimes of hierarchy and dispossession that persist *within* liberalism (Povinelli 2011). The result is what Rinaldo Walcott (2014) calls "zones of black death," or geographical nodes throughout the Americas where forms of diasporic African life are dehumanized, devalued, and discarded, and the city of Buenaventura is an extreme example. This article aims to disrupt the anti-blackness that underpins the disproportionate distribution of violence along racial lines by asking what forms of political life are possible and impossible under such circumstances.[3]

The cultural practices proper to the African diaspora in the Americas are taken up by Caribbean poet and intellectual Kamau Brathwaite.[4] Brathwaite proposes the concept of "nation language" to refer to the original languages spoken by those brought to the Caribbean as slaves and laborers (1984:5-8). The term he prefers for understanding the fate of such languages is "submergence" for they "had to…submerge themselves" beneath the official languages of public discourse—English, French, Spanish, or Dutch—dictated by the colonial rulers (1984:7). "Submerged languages" and the subjects who spoke them were considered inferior (non-human, in fact). They persisted, nonetheless; their rhythm, timbre, grammar, and syntax were always coursing beneath the surface, making themselves imperceptible at certain moments and perceptible at others.[5] Submerged languages were neither static nor exclusive to the subaltern; they were constantly being adapting to dominant cultural imperatives as well as influencing how official languages were spoken by both the colonizers and the colonized (1984:7-8). For

Brathwaite, "submergence" is key to understanding contemporary forms of Caribbean cultural practice. In the literature, poetry, and music he analyzed, what had long been submerged was "increasingly coming to the *surface*" (1984:13, my emphasis).

Seawater is clearly important, both concretely and metaphorically, for Brathwaite's understanding of diasporic African culture. Indeed, remarking on processes of historical change, Brathwaite adopts the concept of *tidalectics* as an alternative to Hegelian/Marxian *dialectics*, more ebb and flow than linear progression. As with his use of "submergence," the rhythms and oscillations of the tides are, for Brathwaite, central to the formation of historical consciousness in the Caribbean and, therefore, analytically appropriate for understanding its cultural forms (Sandiford, 2011:142). The work of the Saint Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott is a paradigmatic example. The sea features prominently in much of Walcott's writing, representing both "troubled memories and histories" and "solidarity and common experience" (Jefferson, 2013:301). Brathwaite's assertion that "unity is submarine" (1974:64) takes this identification further by suggesting that beneath the surface of the sea, along with the bodies of slaves who did not survive the Middle Passage, is a submerged, contiguous political geography that unifies the peoples of the Caribbean Basin (Jefferson 2013:290). Here, histories of slavery, colonialism, and racialization become the medium through which anti-racist, decolonial, and utopian futures are imagined and pursued (McKittrick 2013; Kelley 2003; Pulido 2006). In the case of Afro-Colombian politics and poetics, the Pacific Ocean is at least as important as the Caribbean/Atlantic (cf. Gilroy 1993). Nevertheless, Brathwaite's engagement with the latter provides an opening for understanding cultural and political forms in and around Buenaventura's intertidal zone.

Political ecology and science and technology studies belong to a different tradition, and yet their interest in "nature/culture" allows for productive conversation with Brathwaite's critical theories of race, culture, and colonialism.[6] Marisol de la Cadena shows how "indigenous cosmopolitics" in the Andes has the potential to radically transform a postcolonial political order based on binary separations (human/nonhuman, European/other, etc.) into a "pluriversal politics" comprised of "partially connected heterogeneous socionatural worlds negotiating their ontological disagreements politically" (2010:360). In a similar vein, Brathwaite's "submergence" takes on even greater significance when extended to nonhuman environments and infrastructures and the political formations that accompany them. Following analyses of the material and technical attributes of hydrological and hydraulic systems and the kinds of politics they engender (Anand 2011; von Schnitzler 2008; Carse 2014; Meehan 2014; Furlong 2013; Gandy 2014), "submergence" can be understood as simultaneously socio-material and techno-political, encompassing the wide range of forces that condition specific forms of political life. The concept also shifts the locus of political analysis from land to water (Helmreich 2011; Steinberg and Peters 2015), or more precisely to the interstitial spaces that defy the terrestrial/aquatic binary (Morita and Bruun Jensen; ten Bos 2009).[7] Based on the socio-material conditions of Buenaventura's intertidal zone, the remainder of this article will sketch the outlines of a *submergent* form of political life, where the struggles of Afro-Colombians to contest violent dispossession reflect the racialized politics of precarity under late liberalism.

Fluid Futures

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The relationship between land and sea in Buenaventura is being reconfigured by three intersecting forces, each of which contributes to the precarity of life in the intertidal zone and to the displacement of its inhabitants. The first is economic in nature. The national and local governments both envision a future in which Buenaventura will become a "world-class port city," as is reflected in the jointly authored local economic development plan of the same name (Ministerio de Trabajo 2012). Doing so, the plan wagers, is the key to strengthening the country's global competitiveness and improving employment access and income generation for the city. As Colombia's only Pacific Ocean port, enthusiasm for Buenaventura's rapidly rising "good fortune" (which is, after all, the literal meaning of its name) is tied to projections of booming trade relations with Asia. With commentators far and wide heralding the advent of the "Chinese century," Buenaventura has been labeled "Colombia's gateway to the Pacific," which the local development plan calls the "basin of the future." Lucrative transoceanic fantasies also inspire the burgeoning Pacific Alliance, which seeks greater economic integration and reduced tariff barriers between Colombia, Mexico, Chile, and Peru. Meanwhile, a free trade agreement with Colombia's largest trading partner, the United States, which went into effect in 2012, promises a $1.1 billion expansion of imports, many of which would be destined for Buenaventura.

These visions of free trade and economic development, however fantastical, are beginning to produce material effects in Buenaventura, but not in the form of wealth or prosperity for the local population, which has long been denied a share of the profits generated by the port. Colombian ports were privatized in the early 1990s through concessions granted to regional port "societies," which in turn contracted private

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companies to manage their facilities and operations (Gaviria 1998). With the abolition of labor unions and other measures designed to lower costs and boost profits, Colombian ports began to attract interest from around the world (Jiménez Pérez and Delgado Moreno 2008). To accommodate, but also to entice, the anticipated increase of goods passing through Buenaventura, vast amounts of public and private capital, from the Colombian government and investors from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, are being funneled into infrastructure megaprojects. In addition to the three existing port terminals, there are three more at various stages of completion: the Container Terminal of Buenaventura (TCBUEN) is already in operation, the Port of Agua Dulce is under construction, and the Port of the Dagua River Delta is currently the focus of environmental impact studies. A new multi-lane highway from Buenaventura to the interior is being planned, the cargo train to Cali has been brought back into operation, a logistical operations center is in development, the main shipping canal is being dredged to accommodate larger ships, and funding has already been allocated for the building of a waterfront promenade, or *malecón*, that would ring the southern edge of the island with hotels, restaurants, dance clubs, and casinos. Further on the horizon is a trans-Andean railroad that would cross 750 miles and three mountain ranges to connect Buenaventura with the Orinoco River on the Venezuelan border.[8] These future plans literally and figuratively submerge all other alternatives.

Alongside visions of international commerce and port expansion, another set of forces is actively reshaping the relationship between land and sea in Buenaventura. These projections are tied to a second imminent transformation that is a good deal less optimistic: global climate change. Despite typical problems in predicting what the

warming of the planet will mean on a local level, a range of techniques are used to estimate the potential impacts of climate change on the future of Colombia's ports (Amado et al. 2011:81). There is now general agreement that climate change is likely to make port operations and logistics in Buenaventura increasingly problematic in the years to come.

According to IPCC predictions, the world's tropical areas will experience increased magnitude and intensity of rainfall, especially considering the possible interaction between climate change and the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, which has a major impact on Colombia's climate (Lampis and Fraser 2012:14). There is evidence that precipitation events in some parts of Colombia have already become more intense (Aguilar et al. 2005), and increased average rainfall has been observed in Buenaventura (Amado et al. 2011:42). Moreover, the Colombian national scientific body has reported a 2.2 mm rise in sea level over the previous 40 years at a monitoring station in Buenaventura (IDEAM 2010). Together, increased rainfall and rising sea levels appear to pose serious threats to the port and the city. The government's vulnerability assessment of potential climate change impacts identified Buenaventura as among the most critical zones in the country (Lampis and Fraser 2012:31). These ominous forecasts are producing their own material effects: additional port facilities to reduce operational delays due to inclement weather; further dredging to counteract sedimentation of the shipping canal caused by higher rainfall; and the relocation of seaside populations to protect them from flooding (Amado et al. 2011:121). By justifying displacement in the name of port expansion and disaster risk management, visions of a submerged future contribute to the precarity of life in Buenaventura's intertidal zone.

The third force reshaping the relationship between land and sea results from intensely violent battles for control over strategically important areas. Buenaventura is of major interest to drug traffickers looking for clandestine routes through which to move their product north. Since the risks of exporting cocaine by air or across the Caribbean have increased, impoverished seaside settlements are prime locations for launching small watercraft that connect up with speedboats bound for Central America and Mexico. With the disintegration of the once-powerful drug cartels from Cali and Medellín and the reorganization of right-wing paramilitary groups following their official "demobilization," competition for control over drug trafficking routes has led to violent clashes between highly volatile criminal units the Colombian government calls "emergent criminal gangs" (or *bacrim*). Although FARC guerrillas play a role in the drug trade, and maintain a presence in nearby rural areas, the enigmatic *bacrim* have infiltrated the city and regularly terrorize its inhabitants. These militias, security experts believe, are a direct outgrowth of the notorious paramilitary groups that once controlled large swaths of the county and enjoyed political immunity. This new form of paramilitarism is "less ideological and more mafioso" than its predecessor, as one journalist put it, and is characterized by deadly rivalries between competing factions.[9] The interstitial space between land and sea has become the primary battlefield on which these rivalries are fought out.

A wave of violence washed over Buenaventura in October 2012 as Los Urabeños declared war on La Empresa, the militia that had dominated the city for years. The police department registered 66 murders over a four-month period as the two groups engaged in open-air battles in the streets. This figure is astronomical for a city of only 350,000

people, but other public agencies have placed the death toll much higher. Although forced disappearances are more difficult to count, the official number spiked from 57 in 2011 to 113 in 2012. Mass graves have been discovered along with errant body parts in the rivers and mangrove swamps that abut the city. Fear and intimidation have sent thousands of residents of Buenaventura fleeing; in late 2012, the government agency responsible for monitoring armed conflict reported eight episodes of mass displacement in just two weeks, resulting in over 4,000 people forced from their homes. While the conflict is undoubtedly fueled by the drug trade, many believe that port expansion zones are also primary objectives (cf. Ballvé, 2012). As a neighborhood leader explained to a journalist: "What's at the bottom of this violence is not just drug trafficking, but territorial control over the city. It's a tactic of terror to get the people to move from the paramilitary-controlled waterfront areas and flee to the rural zones so that the megaprojects can have free rein. The *mafiosos*, allied with businessmen, want to force people out through fear."[10] While the police and the armed forces try to establish their authority in contested areas, activists and religious leaders have denounced them for being suspiciously slow to act.[11] In Buenaventura, black lives seem to matter less than the vision of development that depends on maintaining the population in a state of protracted precarity. Submergent forms of political life have become both strategic and necessary.

The Vortex: Bajamar

As the song "My Buenaventura" suggests, the relationship between land and sea goes deeper than international shipping, climate change, and drug trafficking. It's a fluid world, the Pacific coast, with levels of rainfall surpassing even the wettest parts of the

tropics and a vast system of rivers that descend from the mountains to the ocean. The city of Buenaventura was founded on an island, the Isla de Cascajal, which now hosts the commercial center, government offices, and a large percentage of the residential population, and even the more recent areas of expansion on the continental side are transected by numerous rivers and streams (Aprile-Gniset 2002). Aside from a small hillock near downtown, the city is largely flat with depressions and low-lying areas throughout. In fact, the ground is so saturated with water that, from as early as 1860, building sites on the island had to be filled in with earth before construction could proceed (Gärtner 2005). The population of Buenaventura grew in the mid-twentieth century, as Afro-Colombians migrated to the city from nearby river basins and established their settlements in a similar manner—that is, by reclaiming land from the sea. Habituated to riverine life, these migrants gravitated to the edge of the bay, or to the inlets, mudflats, and mangrove swamps that abut and interpenetrate the city on all sides (Mosquera Torres and Aprile-Gniset 2006). There they built houses on stilts, adapted to the brackish estuary's tidal fluctuations, which allowed them to maintain access to fishing resources, their primary ancestral livelihood (Mosquera Torres 2010). Submergence is a socio-material fact in Buenaventura's intertidal zone.

These seaside settlements are now occupied by an estimated 110,000 inhabitants, mostly Afro-Colombian. Collectively known as Bajamar (meaning "low tide"), they are home to approximately one third of the city's total population. Positioned at the interface between land and water, Bajamar has become the vortex of the economic, ecological, and political forces converging on Buenaventura. The national and local governments see Bajamar as an obstacle to development since it occupies the land on which megaprojects

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are slated to be built. This vision, which combines technical and aesthetic criteria for how a "world-class port city" should look and function, would require the displacement of the majority of its residents. So, too, projections of the potential impacts of global climate change identify these settlements as highly vulnerable and in need of relocation. According to the city's recently created risk management agency, the imperative to create a "resilient" Buenaventura demands the removal of low-lying occupations classified as "high risk." Finally, wars between rival paramilitary groups and state security forces are concentrated in these very same areas due to their strategic importance to the economies, both legal and illegal, that depend on Buenaventura for access to overseas markets. A lot of money is at stake in these battles for territorial control, and not just by trafficking drugs, but by using violence, torture, and intimidation to facilitate ostensibly legal commerce. The result is even greater violence and displacement in Bajamar, making it one of the most concentrated "zones of black death" in the Americas today.

Port expansion, climate change adaptation, and paramilitary violence actively reinforce one another. Projections of increased rainfall and rising sea levels further motivate dredging operations already justified by visions of booming trade among countries of the Pacific Basin, adding additional urgency to port expansion plans previously bolstered by economic imperatives alone. Dredging subsequently increases tidal fluctuations and storm surges in the Bay of Buenaventura, making flood risk even more pronounced in waterfront areas and thereby strengthening the resolve of relocation projects in designated "zones of high risk." These combined pressures make residents of Bajamar more vulnerable to paramilitary groups fighting for control over their territories. Ultimately, the violence inflicted on these communities by rival militias makes otherwise

undesirable state-led relocation projects appear preferable to forced displacement carried out at gunpoint without compensation. In turn, the exodus of residents fleeing the threat of death or dismemberment feeds back to encourage capital investment in the development of port infrastructure. It is worth noting that, just as the raging violence of late 2012 reached its zenith, the multinational port operations conglomerate based in Dubai, DP World, which owns 60 maritime terminals in six continents, paid $150 million for the majority share of Regional Port Society of Buenaventura.[12] As a local religious leader put it, "Paramilitaries and development go hand in hand."

According to an Afro-Colombian activist, this is how dispossession is accomplished: "First a bunch of whites and *mestizos* come in and say they want to buy the land. It could be the government or it could be private buyers. It's all on the up and up. Some people might accept the offer, but in general the majority of people don't want to leave, so they say no." Then, he said, outsiders appear with claims to ownership based on falsified documents. Meanwhile, the mayor's office designates the area a "zone of high risk" and orders that residents be relocated to a landlocked housing project. "But we everyone knows what's behind all this," the activist asserted. "They don't want to consult us. They don't want us to decide whether to move or not. Relocation, if it's going to happen, has to be voluntary. Instead, when people make it clear they don't want to move, that's when the paramilitaries come in."

The activist then recounted a recent example of relocation-at-gunpoint. He said an unknown group arrived in trucks blasting music and carrying alcohol to throw a block party. "When the party was over," he said, "a bunch of guys with weapons stayed behind. They set up check-points to control who came and went. If people they didn't recognize

entered, they questioned them. If they didn't like what they heard, those people never came back out." Then the group took control of the electricity network, shutting off the lights at 8pm as a tactic of intimidation. "They call these groups *bacrim,*" he reflected; "but it's the same old thing. Just like in the rural areas, paramilitaries clear people off their land so businesses can come in and make millions. Their objective is to evacuate territory, just as it has always been. Here in Buenaventura it's the same situation. They pressure them until they find it too difficult and flee." In spite of the precarity of everyday life, though deeply affected by it, many residents of Bajamar refuse to leave without a fight. A submergent politics is the result, whereby Afro-Colombians work both within and outside formations of liberal governance and their logics of vulnerability and protection.

The Politics of Urban Blackness

The vast majority of Buenaventura's 350,000 inhabitants are of African descent, and the city has long been an important site for Afro-Colombian politics and activism. This means that the efforts of residents of Bajamar to resist displacement and dispossession, and the opportunities and constraints they encounter, are conditioned by ethno-racial politics in Colombia and, in particular, by how black populations are positioned, and position themselves, as legal and political subjects.[13] Since the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, the Colombian state has recognized itself officially as "multicultural" and "pluri-ethnic." The 1991 Constitution established a number of protections for the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, including the mandate to create comprehensive legislation for the black population. The subsequent passage of Law 70,

or the Law of Black Communities, in 1993 granted Afro-Colombians both symbolic recognition within the official narrative of Colombian history as well as rights to collective land title, to cultural protection, to the benefits of development, and to be consulted on development projects that affect them. Crucially, Law 70 granted these rights to *comunidades negras* ("black communities") officially defined as a culturally distinct ethnic group.[14] As Tianna Paschel (2010:730) points out, this landmark piece of legislation followed the logic of "ethnic difference" and "cultural identity" rather than "racial equality" or "racial justice." This multiculturalist codification constituted the black political subject in particular ways, which continue to shape the territorial struggles underway in Bajamar. Oscillating in and out of this fixed subject position, inhabiting it at one moment and critiquing it at another, is a submergent political tactic.

The Process of Black Communities (or PCN for short), which has its base in Buenaventura, is one of the primary organizations advocating for Afro-Colombian rights. PCN is better characterized as an activist network than a single group, and its influence extends throughout the rural black communities of the Pacific coast (Asher 2009; Escobar 2008). Many of these communities live in resource-rich areas frequently under attack by paramilitary groups allied with agribusiness, mining, or energy companies. PCN's efforts to defend Afro-Colombian territories against the threat of forced displacement reflect the political geography of multiculturalism in Colombia (cf. Bocarejo, 2012, 2014).[15] As Paschel argues, the outcome of the negotiations that led to the passage of Law 70 was that "the rural black political subject...would become the prototype for granting rights to black populations in Colombia" (2010:749). However, as forced displacement and territorial dispossession continue to push Afro-Colombians into cities like Buenaventura

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(Oslender 2007), and as these same dynamics increasingly unfold *within* cities, PCN (2011) faces the question of what black political subjectivity means in an urban context.

The displacement pressures mounting in Buenaventura principally affect territories that have been occupied by Afro-descendent populations for over 50 years in some cases, which have more recently become politically and economically strategic. A PCN activist called these *comunidades afro-urbanas* ("Afro-urban communities"). This particular combination of ethno-racial and spatial classifications intentionally disrupts the automatic association of the black population with the rural territories of the Pacific coast. Although it explicitly marks a difference between urban and rural Afro-Colombians, their collective rights regardless of location are at stake here.

The imperative to articulate a black *urban* politics raises fundamental questions about both ethno-racial and urban politics in Colombia. Given the territorially-bound and ethnically-based logic of state multiculturalism that has developed over the past two decades, what rights do Afro-Colombians have, what protections are they entitled to, and what demands can they make on the state when they do not resemble the figure of the rural black political subject? And if the logic of cultural protection undergirds the political, legal, and discursive structures within which black populations are positioned, and position themselves, what opportunities and constraints does this create for activists and residents struggling to resist displacement and dispossession?

PCN leaders argue that the systematic clearance of land required for port expansion megaprojects in Buenaventura, whether done legally by the municipal government or illegally by paramilitary groups, violates the right to *consulta previa* (prior consultation). This is the formal mechanism, established following Law 70, that entitles

black communities to participate in decisions regarding development projects that affect them. But juridically speaking there is no rights infringement since prior consultation applies only to "black communities" as defined by law—that is, those with collective title to rural lands—rather to the Afro-Colombian population as a whole. The same is true, a PCN activist explained, for the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, which mandates the restoration of property to rural communities who had been forced by the armed conflict to abandon it.

> They tell us that the only legitimate subjects of reparation are the communities with collective land title. Imagine that. In [the region of] Buenaventura, there have been more than 1,500 violent deaths in 5 years [the number of forced displacements is much higher], and not all of these have been in rural areas or in *consejos comunitarios* (community councils, or the political entity of black communities) with collective land title. Urban communities have been terrorized by the violence as well. It is impossible to make the state understand that this community is also a "black community" despite the fact that it has the same cultural practices and is in a situation of forced displacement. Our territorial rights must be extended to urban areas…We need a broader concept of prior consultation and land restitution.

At present, these entitlements submerge Afro-Colombians in the city within the generic urban population, rendering them unintelligible to formations of liberal multiculturalism.

As a result, many activists see the need to establish Afro-Colombian rights in (and to) the city. They argue that the distinction between the "urban" and the "rural," once codified in legislation and public policy, segments the black population and limits its collective entitlements. In the words of a PCN leader:

> We see much of Buenaventura as an extension of *el campo poblado* (the settled countryside) that has come about in the same way that black communities have been occupying and inhabiting territory throughout history. The work that has gone into settling and consolidating these areas [such as Bajamar] is tremendous, filling in the mudflats, building houses supported by stilts, establishing infrastructure, and so on. They have established a colony here just like they have everywhere else.

Settlement patterns are not all that defies the rural/urban divide. Forced displacement, which has disproportionately affected Afro-Colombians, ensures that stable, long-term relationships between people and place are untenable. Tying political recognition to the historical occupation of land ignores the fact that survival often depends on mobility. But moving to cities rarely means abandoning established cultural practices, social relations, and sources of livelihood, and many urban Afro-Colombians maintain dynamic connections with their communities of origin. No matter how the "urban" is defined, it is difficult to maintain the clear divide with the "rural" on Colombia's Pacific coast.

Vulnerability and Protection

In light of the political and legal constraints encountered by black activists and residents in Buenaventura, other creative strategies for marking territory have emerged in response to the threat of displacement. For example, many reject the use of the name Bajamar, meaning literally "low tide," to refer to these neighborhoods since this implies they are both ecologically vulnerable and legally suspect: ecologically vulnerable since low-lying tidal areas have been identified as having the highest levels of flood risk; legally suspect since permanent human settlement is prohibited by law within 50 meters of the high-tide line. Both implications lead to the same conclusion—mandatory relocation—although they are justified according to different governmental imperatives: the former by the imperative to manage disaster risk (or adapt to climate change) and the latter by the imperative to uphold the rule of law. "We call these areas *territorios ganados al mar* (territories reclaimed from the sea)," a local leader told me, positioning these settlements within the frame of development and progress. Rather than passive

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victims in precarious conditions, residents become active agents domesticating nature and putting it to use.

"Marking territory" is more than just a process by which people give meaning to place and establish claims to ownership; in Buenaventura, it is also the name of a cultural project in the disputed "low-tide" neighborhood of Barrio Lleras. Marcando Territorio was formed when activists and church leaders joined forces with a collective of producers, rappers, and singers to set up a recording studio. In 2010, a local parish priest organized a rap competition, which drew such a large turnout that the collective decided to shoot a music video. In December of that year, they uploaded the result, which also bore the name "Marcando Territorio," to YouTube.

The video begins in black and white with a casual meeting on the street between three members of the group. One informs the other two that residents of Barrio Lleras are being displaced from their homes. The ones receiving the news are alarmed, and the three quickly decide to compose a song in response. As the trio marches through the streets of the neighborhood, gathering followers as they go, they discuss what the song will be about. "I've got the theme," one says. "How does it go?," another asks. "Marcando territorio," he responds. *Excelente, mi homie*, he fires back. The video then shifts into color, and cuts to a large group assembled in a semi-circle facing the camera.

The song is over ten minutes long, and features rapid-fire performances by more than twenty rappers of all ages over a reggaeton beat. Forced displacement, rights violations, unified resistance—ultimately, marking territory—are common themes. The song became an instant hit in Barrio Lleras and throughout other seaside settlements in Buenaventura facing the same pressures. It was eventually featured in a series of articles

and short documentary videos produced by Al Jazeera in 2011. The group that formed

around this project then recorded a second music video with support from the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees. They have since released a single under the title *Consulta*

Previa, referencing the right that they have been denied as plans to replace their

neighborhood with a waterfront promenade move forward. Three of the masterminds

behind the original project, all of them in their early twenties, were emphatic about their

music's intended effect:

> Since most of us are against relocation, violence is the only way to clear
> us out. We did the song to show people that it's possible to stop all that. At
> that moment [of making the video], people were starting to give up their
> properties and accept relocation. Our song made them think twice.

However, the success of their campaign also made them enemies:

> Initially, some of the neighborhood leaders got upset. They had been paid
> to get others to accept the deal, to convince people to relocate. Imagine: a
> group of crazies coming along with a music video saying the people of
> Barrio Lleras aren't going anywhere. We received a bunch of threats and
> had to lower our profile after that.

Ethnomusicologist Michael Birenbaum Quintero suggests that projecting music

loudly into urban space is one of the few forms of political expression possible in

Buenaventura.[16] While Marcando Territorio seeks to be seen and heard, using a range of

communication strategies to publicize their message (such as YouTube as well as local

performances), they must also be careful to moderate their audibility and visibility.

Activists, journalists, and politically engaged musicians throughout Colombia, and

especially in Buenaventura, are often targets of intimidation and violence.[17] Many

regularly rotate through SIM cards and arrange their meetings in protected places. A

climate of fear pervades everyday life in Buenaventura, and it is multiplied for those who

speak or act out. Their politics, like the intertidal zone in which they work, must exist

both below and above the surface, occasionally submerging itself only to resurface later when the time is right. This is true for those explicitly engaged in political activism, but similar strategies are adopted by residents of Bajamar as they go about their daily routines. Even the simplest of acts, such as crossing the city to visit a relative who lives in another neighborhood, demand extreme measures of precaution.

As the song "Marking Territory" makes clear, the contemporary relationship between the port and the city, between land and sea, is not nearly as harmonious as it was when "My Buenaventura" was written. Residents of the seaside settlements of Bajamar are now subject to a number of different threats: climate change, paramilitary violence, port expansion. Which threats are real and which are contrived depends on who you ask: the national and municipal governments say these areas are vulnerable to flooding but that residents invent stories about paramilitary groups in order to demand state protection; activists, religious leaders, and settlers say that these areas are vulnerable to paramilitary violence but that flood risk merely justifies their displacement. These different perspectives converge on the category of vulnerability.

The director of the municipal risk management agency explained why the inhabitants of *terrenos de bajamar* had to be relocated:

> The national government passed Law 1523 in 2012, and this required Buenaventura to have a risk management agency. We're following the letter of the law. In terms of territorial planning, risk management has to be the first step. This is the first step in creating and implementing a master plan. Everything has to be done from the point of view of risk. Risk must prevail above everything else we do in terms of planning and development. These areas [Bajamar] are living with risk because we didn't plan well in the past. From now on, that will have to change.

At the General Maritime Directorate (DIMAR), the national authority for coastal

regulation, the naval captain assigned to the Port of Buenaventura described this as a

more straightforward problem of illegality:

> The majority of the city is in *zonas de bajamar* (low-tide zones). These properties are *bienes de uso public* (for public use only). The residents are asking for water delivery, for electricity, for sewage, for basic services. But the regulations won't allow it, since these are invasions of public space. City Hall is supposed to do the relocation along with the police. We don't have the manpower to go in and do evictions. That's their job.

But while the naval captain did not resort to the logic of disaster risk management to

justify resettlement, he nevertheless concurred with the municipal government's

evaluation: "The *zonas de bajamar* are extremely vulnerable. In the event of a tsunami,

this is the first part of the city that is going to flood."

Residents of Buenaventura's seaside settlements emphasize their own

vulnerability, though in different ways. For example, one of the members of the

collective, Marcando Territorio, dismissed ecological threats while emphasizing human

ones:

> Now they're talking about the risk of tsunami. They say that we have to be relocated because this is a "zone of high risk." I've lived here for four years; him 5 years; he's been here his whole life; others have been here for two or three generations. Now there's a tsunami threat? [All laugh.] We're not against development, but there are other interests behind all this. They say we live in "Bajamar," that we're vulnerable. They say that we're "at risk." But what about them? Are they super anti-tsunami? Are they so prepared that they don't need to worry? They say this area will flood. But a tsunami would wreck the whole city. The best option would be to negotiate with people so they can stay in their homes. Our proposal is neighborhood improvement. But we're afraid that what happened in la Imaculada [a similar settlement on the other side of the city] with the expansion of TCBUEN [port terminal] is going to happen here. You know, the paramilitaries infiltrate the *barrio* and say, "You have to sell or sell." [All laugh.] We know how it works. They'll say, *Para sobrevivir tienen que salir*. "You have to leave if you want to survive."

A religious leader introduced another possibility, which complicated the distinction between the (false) threat of flooding and the (real) threat of displacement: "They're trying to get people out of here any way they can. I wouldn't be surprised if they eventually flood these areas and get people to move that way. After all, they need higher water levels to get the really big ships in and out of the bay, so it would serve two purposes at the same time." Although the cause of vulnerability is in question, "vulnerability" as an ontological condition is not.

A politics of protection is the logical extension. Given the history of ethno-racial politics in Colombia, "cultural protection" is already the overarching rationality of state multiculturalism within which Afro-Colombians are positioned as political subjects. For example, to demand that plans for a new mining operation recognize its potentially harmful impact on black communities, their representatives bear the burden of demonstrating that the project poses a threat to their "culture" and jeopardizes their right to difference. For the purpose of contrast, the argument that Afro-Colombians have been historically discriminated against, are the victims of racism, and are exposed disproportionately to the negative effects of development has very little legal or political traction at present in Colombia. To be recognized as subjects deserving of the state's protective care, Afro-Colombians must position themselves as lives at risk in a cultural sense (cf. Zeiderman 2013).

Since the creation of the legal and political framework for the cultural protection of black communities in 1993, the Colombian state has established other forms of protection for the population at large and for Afro-Colombians in particular. In 2004, for example, the Constitutional Court declared a crisis of internal forced displacement and

ordered the state to guarantee the rights of *desplazados*, or displaced persons, and to protect their lives. In 2009, the Court issued a subsequent ruling recognizing Afro-Colombians as "subjects of special protection" in "conditions of special vulnerability," requiring "state authorities at all levels to exercise particular diligence with respect to the special duties of prevention, care, and protection of the individual and collective rights of victims of forced displacement among the Afro-Colombian population." Through these and other measures pertaining to the vulnerability of victims of violence, Afro-Colombians are now subject to mechanisms of protection that are both multicultural *and* biopolitical. The state imagines itself as the benevolent patriarchal protector of different forms of life as well as of life itself.

In this context, Afro-Colombian *urban* politics is intelligible to the state provided it conforms to a politics of vulnerability (cf. Cárdenas 2012:130-131). The protection of life, in both multicultural and biopolitical terms, shapes the opportunities and constraints activists and residents encounter. The intersection between the 1993 Law of Black Communities and the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law is a perfect example.[18] Although the former establishes rights based on the argument that different forms of life are valuable to the extent that they are culturally distinct, the latter grants entitlements according to a commitment to life itself. The overarching logic in both cases is protection, and the capacity of subjects to engage in political relationships with the state depends on their ability to position themselves as lives, and as forms of life, under threat. However, multicultural and biopolitical protection often come into conflict, such as when restitution for victims of violence with *collective* rights are dealt with as *individual* lives. As PCN activists argue:

> Our collective life is linked to the defense and recreation of the ancestral cultural practices that differentiate us. When the war comes to our territories, it damages individual life but also collective life. What the state does is respond to the damages done to individual life: for a death, the state pays 7 million pesos. If you lost your home, they give you a new one in an urban area. But the state does not measure damage to collective life. Behind these deaths, behind this territorial dispossession, behind this displacement, there is a whole social and cultural fabric. When that is damaged, what is at risk is the survival of the black community as such…The collective life of the black community is in imminent danger.[19]

The Colombian state, they stress, must therefore create space for the protection of all forms of life that exist, rather than just life itself.

Biopolitical and multicultural forms of protection also clash in the relocation of seaside settlements in Buenaventura. Resettlement plans are justified by the imperatives of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation, both of which are predicated on the state's responsibility to protect life in its most basic biological sense. Since this biopolitical form of protection would ultimately result in territorial dispossession, Afro-Colombian activists respond with multicultural arguments. They oppose the imperative to protect life itself by saying that it jeopardizes their different form of life. What is not in question is that black political subjectivity is legible—politically and legally—to the extent that it is vulnerable to threat and in need of protection. These formations of liberal governance and their multicultural and biopolitical logics of recognition both enable and constrain efforts to resist displacement and dispossession in Buenaventura.

Submergent Politics

In conclusion, it remains to consider what the territorial struggles underway in Buenaventura's seaside settlements suggest about the politics of precarity under late liberalism. In contemporary social theory, tropes of *insurgence* and *emergence* are used

frequently to designate novel political formations. Citing active processes of becoming,

these tropes point to the fact that existing theories are inadequate for understanding how

popular politics is unfolding around the world. Although I share with these analyses a

general discomfort with resorting to abstract universals (e.g., freedom, democracy,

citizenship, rights) as the automatic referent for political analysis and critique, this article

takes a slightly different tack by sketching the outlines of a politics of *submergence*.

Literally designating the state of being inundated by a relative rise in water levels,

submergence draws our attention to the socio-material relationship between land and sea

as well as to the political condition of being resigned or forced to descend below the

surface, to cover oneself or be covered over, to remain obscure and invisible. While

critical reflexivity is necessary when using water metaphors to generate theory

(Helmreich 2011), there are at least three reasons why the socio-material conditions of

the intertidal zone, and in particular the figure of submergence, are both appropriate for

comprehending the racialized politics of precarity under late liberalism.

The first is that submergence offers us a way to think about forms of political life

under conditions of heightened insecurity, which are in turn shaped by overarching logics

of vulnerability and protection, both multicultural and biopolitical. This is the situation

that Afro-Colombians are forced to confront given the history of ethno-racial politics and

racialized dispossession in Colombia, which is underwritten by a tacit devaluation of

black lives. Submergent politics unfolds specifically within what we might call "fragile

republics" in which politics in its various normative guises is impeded or prohibited by

regimes of lawlessness and terror, especially for those who are exposed

disproportionately to violence. We need to look beyond familiar frames of reference for

other conceptual tools that can help us understand forms of cultural and political practice in places like Buenaventura. If *insurgence* is about rising up in active resistance or revolt to claim membership, entitlement, or authority, and *emergence* is about the concrete manifestation of the vital, irreducible, creative potential imminent to life itself, *submergence* illuminates a politics that makes no such claims and has more modest pretentions. In contexts of protracted precarity, remaining beneath the surface, rendering oneself concealed and undetectable, may be strategic or even necessary. Such political positioning is reflected in the efforts of Afro-Colombian activists in Buenaventura and residents of seaside settlements living under the perpetual threat of paramilitary violence. In order to pursue change and survive to see the results, they must often work behind closed doors and out of sight, or in the interstices of visibility and invisibility.

Secondly, the figure of submergence helps us understand forms of political life specific to the crisis of legitimacy plaguing late liberalism. Like tropes of insurgence and emergence, it allows us to appreciate novel formations of political subjectivity and collectivity that stretch and strain liberal values and institutions in unexpected ways, that expand or challenge their established frames of recognition, or that defy the liberal/illiberal binary altogether. For example, it contends with situations in which liberal ideals such as free will, universality, equality, and transparency are less central than demands for protection, claims to dependence, assertions of difference, or other "illiberal" political aspirations. Likewise, the politics of submergence points to deep divisions of race, class, gender, and sexuality that fragment the social world, working within forms of difference, hierarchy, and opacity rather than assuming their progressive and eventual disappearance. As liberal governance is frequently consistent with extreme

forms of racialized violence and dispossession—selecting only certain cultural and economic values to be protected—descending below the horizon of intelligibility, covering oneself up or over, and ensuring obscurity are strategies employed by those whose lives are rendered perpetually precarious.

Finally, the politics of submergence points to concrete socio-material processes, such as flooding, sea-level rise, tidal flows, hurricanes, and tsunamis. Designating the potential or actual predicament of being below the surface of the water, it speaks to the political and ecological mutations provoked by global environmental change. For scholars and activists alike, these mutations demand a heightened sensitivity to socio-material relations, to human-nonhuman entanglements, and to political communities of people and things. As with the crisis of legitimacy facing late liberalism, especially in conditions of heightened insecurity, again there is the need for conceptual tools appropriate to contemporary political formations—ones that also account for the planetary transformations wrought by climate change. One line of thinking connects these transformations to a "post-political" evacuation of radical critique and ideological conflict from the space of public debate, the reduction of politics to consensus-building and policy-making, and the triumph of technocratic, managerial liberalism as the hegemonic form of global governance (Rancière 2009; Swyngedouw 2010; Žižek 2008). However, this argument is too quick to declare a break between the "political" past and the "post-political" present and surprisingly uninterested in actually existing politics that do not conform to its normative expectations. In highlighting the territorial struggles of Afro-Colombians in Buenaventura's intertidal zone, submergence points to other political currents below the surface.

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Endnotes

[1] This article draws primarily on interviews and site visits conducted in 2013 during two short stays of two to three weeks each in Buenaventura. One visit coincided with an event that brought together activists, community leaders, NGOs, municipal authorities, lawyers, urbanists, and members of the interested public to discuss the question of *territorios afro-urbanos* ("Afro-urban territories"). The argument is based also on interviews conducted with activists, humanitarian workers, and government officials in Bogotá as well analysis of policy and planning documents, media archives, and communications materials. Approximately 25 interviews were conducted in total, and all names have been changed or omitted to protect anonymity. Since Afro-Colombian activists are frequently subjected to death threats and violence, I also avoid using personally identifying pronouns. Though long-term fieldwork in Buenaventura was deemed unfeasible due to the security situation, supporting the analysis are over two years of ethnographic research in Colombia (2008-2010, with subsequent follow-up visits) on the politics of security, vulnerability, and protection.

[2] Although "liberalism" is by no means a singular phenomenon, but rather "a set of spatially dispersed tactics" that "appears under a consistent name" (Povinelli, 2013a:30), postcolonial studies have pointed out that it is often inadequate to the task of understanding popular politics around the world (Chatterjee 2004).

[3] Katherine McKittrick touches on the dangers of naturalizing anti-black violence through its repetition in scholarly work (Hudson 2014). Without pretending to resolve this analytical predicament, I avoid the assumption that naming and describing black death somehow denaturalizes it. Instead, I aim to probe some of the limits and possibilities of political formations that respond to racial violence and injustice.

[4] I am most grateful for Katherine McKittrick's editorial guidance and for pointing me to the work of Kamau Brathwaite and other Caribbean writers and intellectuals, whose writings on "submergence" and the sea I have found productive and inspiring.

[5] A parallel can be drawn with Edouard Glissant's "forced poetics," or the language "practiced by a community which cannot express itself directly through an autonomous activity of its members" (1976:96). Among slaves, Glissant writes, "expression was cautious, reticent, whispered at night" (1976:96). Another source of inspiration is James Scott's (1985, 1992) work on popular political expression under conditions of domination.

[6] My focus here is somewhat different from the literature that critically examines articulations of race, space, and nature (Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003; Brahinsky, Sasser, and Minkoff-Zern 2014) and legacies of environmental injustice (Pulido 2000).

[7] A parallel line of inquiry in urban studies takes seriously the "where" of urban politics (Rodgers, Barnett, and Cochrane 2014) in order to construct new "grammars of urban justice and injustice" (MacLeod and McFarlane 2014).

[8] "Conozca los megaproyectos de Buenaventura," *El Tiempo*, November 24, 2012.

[9] Alfredo Molano Jimeno, "Buenaventura, entre la pobreza y la violencia," *El Espectador*, February 23, 2013.

[10] Alfredo Molano Jimeno, "Buenaventura, entre la pobreza y la violencia," *El Espectador*, February 23, 2013 and "La guerra por los terrenos del área urbana," *El Espectador*, February 24, 2013.

[11] "Iglesia denuncia retoma paramilitar en Buenaventura," *El Tiempo*, November 9, 2012.

[12] "Arabes invierten en Puerto de Buenaventura," *El Tiempo*, October 24, 2012; Michele Talbot, "DP World takes 19% stake in Colombian terminal for \$150m," *Seatrade Maritime News*, July 15, 2013.

[13] Much has been written on Afro-Colombian activism, politics, and social movements, and my analysis relies heavily on the work of others (Paschel 2010; Wade 2002; Escobar 2008; Restrepo 2004; Asher 2009; Oslender 2007; Valencia 2011; Cárdenas 2012b; Restrepo and Rojas 2004). It has been recognized that geography matters to ethno-racial politics in Colombia (Oslender 2011; Bocarejo 2012), and studies have examined issues facing Afro-descendent migrants and *desplazados* in cities (Barbary and Urrea 2004; Observatorio Contra la Discriminación y el Racismo 2012; Arboleda 2004). However, less attention has been paid to the problematic of Afro-Colombian *urban* politics (cf. Agudelo 2004).

[14] Ethno-racial terminology is highly contested in Colombia. In this article, "black," "Afro-Colombian," and "Afro-descendent" are used somewhat interchangeably as forms of self-identification that are not necessarily based on traceable African origins, whereas "black communities" carries a more specific legal and policy meaning.

[15] Law 70 recognizes "black communities" as those communities "that have traditionally occupied the uncultivated (empty) lands in the rural zones adjoining the rivers of the Pacific Basin, in accordance with their traditional cultivation practices" and grants them "the right to collective property."

[16] Birenbaum Quintero (2013) has worked extensively on the music of the Colombian Pacific. His suggestive comments about the politics of loudness in Buenaventura come from a 2014 conference paper at Stony Brook University.

[17] Clar Ni Chonghaile, "Colombian activists risk their lives to protect women from gang warfare," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2014; Teo Ballvé, "Medellín: who's afraid of hip-hop?," *openDemocracy*, March 4, 2013; Jonathon David Orta, "Paramilitary groups in Colombia target journalists," Journalism in the Americas Blog, 2014.

[18] Meghan Morris is beginning to shed light on the complex machinations of the land restitution process in Colombia.

[19] Danelly Estupiñan, "An Ongoing Search for Justice and Security in Colombia"s Afrodescendent Communities," organized by WOLA: Washington Office on Latin America, March 14, 2013.