

The Region: Emptied Spaces and Geographies of Death in Colombia

Abstract In this chapter, Vergara-Figueroa describes how people at Bojayá constantly face death. She identifies the main characteristics of the Atrato region on the Colombian Pacific coast and the living conditions of Afro-Colombians. In doing so, she places Bellavista, the municipality of Bojayá and the state of Chocó in the global context of violence and land dispossession. She argues that territories are historical formations that need to be understood within the context in which they are conceived, produced, lived, re-produced, and unproduced. So are the experiences of land dispossession. Bellavista-Bojayá illustrates the intricate power of the intersection between people, rivers and territories. Contrary to spaces that are design for enjoyment and for living a life with dignity, the territories of Chocó and its rivers are laboratories of death. The massacre at Bellavista is one of a series of violent events that have occurred in the Atrato River region and it is reviewed in the context of similar events around the world.

Keywords World system · Emptied spaces · Geographies of death
Colombia · Bojayá · Chocó

Territories are socio-geo-historical formations that need to be understood within the context in which they are conceived, produced, lived, re-produced, and unproduced. So are the experiences of land dispossession. Bellavista-Bojayá illustrates the intricate power of the intersection

between people, rivers and territories. People at Bojayá constantly face death. Contrary to spaces that are designed for enjoyment and to live a life of dignity, the territories of Chocó and its rivers have been kept as laboratories of death. The massacre at Bellavista is one of a series of violent events that have occurred in the Atrato River region and can be linked to the world system. In this chapter, I describe the main characteristics of the region and the living conditions of Afro-Colombians using the empirical and historical grounds in which my understanding of deracination and my working hypothesis of the Diaspora-Territorialization-Deracination/Diaspora (D-T-D²) model have been shaped. In so doing, I place Bellavista in the global context of violence and land dispossession.

If we are to fully comprehend the stories of the families presented in Chap. 3, we need to know the history of their territories, the competing logics behind their land struggles, and their legacies. Their lives and the battles to survive that each of the families depicted in this book undergo are shaped by the legacies of slavery and the colonial foundation of the power, which reconfigure in every historical period to dispossess the population that resides in the land where they have worked, fought, and produced. It is a history of a racialized and gendered labor exploitation.

As such, we need to unpack the colonial, modern, racial, sexual, patriarchal, and capitalist historical forces that have shaped the process of land dispossession of Bellavista and communities in the Atrato River region. In the narratives presented in Chap. 3 are two major issues: the competing logics of the meaning of the land for capitalist exploitation vs. as an integral part of the community life, and the multiple actors and processes of the current armed conflict in Colombia. We see how the interviewees attribute responsibility to one armed group or the other, but this is a phenomenon that goes beyond just this depiction.

In this chapter I develop the argument that historical analysis is essential for thinking critically of the scope of the notion of forced migration. As stated earlier, I argue that historicizing land dispossession, 'race,' racism, patriarchy, labor exploitation, and region making are as central as conflict arising from development projects and disasters, which have been established as the main factors that induce forced migration.

Hence, the third silenced layer of meaning in the mainstream conceptualization of forced migration is historical analysis. Arguably, the concepts of forced migration and forced displacements are limited in explaining the complexity of deracination as a world-historical reality. In

the case of Bellavista-Bojayá, the scope of historical analysis is too narrow to make sense of the isolated facts and observations listed in Table 2.1. In this table, I summarize major dates of land dispossession in the Bellavista region over a period of four centuries.

I introduce these historical dates from the region to argue that it is not possible to articulate a relevant sociological analysis in the absence of historical categories capable of comprehending how and why these events relate. The prevailing categories are unable to explain how countries and populations with similar histories—of racialization, conquest, and domination—are the targets of ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of dislocation. Hence, we need new categories such as deracination and diaspora to comprehend historical process and their social complexity.

The concepts of deracination and diaspora offer these analytics. I will develop this argument in four parts in this chapter. First, I introduce the concepts and methods of deracination as diaspora and as categories of historical analysis, social mobilization, and their power as legal categories for reparation. Second, I reflect on the stories of Chap. 3 to assess how resisting deracination has allowed the Bellavista community to deny its displaced status. I discuss the major effects of this phenomenon. Third, I move towards the development of a research design that builds on these analytics. I develop the three components of socio-historical analysis of my conception of deracination: power, knowledge, and liberation, along with the four dimensions underlying them: history, representation, memory, and mobilization. I conclude my attempt to demonstrate the limitations of the framework of forced migration, developing the notion of world-historical emptied-spaces. I propose a historiography on the forms of land acquisition and land tenure in the Bajo Atrato region as a strategy to comprehend the meaning of collective territories, and the power of what these communities call ancestry. I compare this conception of territory into an historical revision of how spaces in which deracination occurs are constructed discursively. Building on Arturo Escobar’s notion of “developmentaizable spaces,” I describe how the same territories are portrayed as spaces for exploitation. Hence, I confront these two competing logics to conclude my narrative on how the context of place-based ethno-territorial social mobilization and violence in the territories of the state of Chocó enlighten alternative ways to comprehend experiences of deracination, and new cycles of diaspora among Afrodescendent and Indigenous populations in the world system.

Table 2.1 Summary of key events of deracination in the Bojayá Region 1500–2002

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

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

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

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

^bThis royal ordinance was communicated through the “Cedula Real de 31 de Diciembre de 1549. Footnote # 12 in Romoli Kathleen. “El Alto Chocó en el siglo XVI”. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*. Vol. XIX. Bogotá. Instituto Colombiano de Cultura. 1975, pp. 14–16

^cSmall villages

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

DERACINATION AND DIASPORA AS CONCEPTS AND METHODS

How does deracination and diaspora capture new realities? How do the concepts capture new global realities or designate old phenomena in a new way? As stated in Chap. 1, the concepts of diaspora and deracination allow us to capture historically and geographically specific processes of land dispossession from a world-historical decolonial perspective. In this sense, I propose the concept of deracination as a category to articulate how local conceptions of territory are constructed historically, and the impact of being dispossessed from it, and connect it to similar experiences in the world system through the rationales of the concept of diaspora. Applying a D-T-D² cycle (Diaspora-Territorialization-Deracination/Diaspora), these two notions surface as significant analytical tools to comprehend first, a history of territorial settlement as all human beings; second, an experience of deracination; third, a process of dispersion, a condition of dislocation; four, a politicization of the condition of diaspora as a project of affinity, and the re-start to the cycle through the creation of new territorial settlements; new experiences of deracination, and so forth.

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

- Deracination as one of the foundations of the contemporary moment of the Afrodescendent, Indigenous, Mestizo Diasporas; the historical formations of the relations of domination based on the marginalization/isolation of the other(s).
- The historical process by which racial, sexual, class, gender, and spatial categories condense to produce a marginalized other. This naturalizes the condition of who deserves to live and who deserves to die as a process of allocation of targets in cultures, bodies and territories.

- Deracination can be conceived as a social relation of domination, as a mechanism, as well as a complex of social relationships that are the foundations of historical institutions trans-historically, and trans-locally founding and maintaining imperial formations and modern nation-states.
- Deracination as violence is constitutive of modernity/coloniality. It is a foundational political epistemic category constitutive of the diasporas, exiles, holocausts, ethnic cleansings and genocide in different societies.

RESISTING DERACINATION DENYING THE DISPLACED STATUS

Thus viewed, I set the rationales for an analytical framework to study processes of Deracination and Diaspora reflecting on the unanswered questions of the current literature of forced displacement and forced migration (Chap. 1) and the lessons learned from the stories of the survivors of Bellavista (Chap. 3). The basic epistemological assumption of this framework is rooted in the significance of locating an act of violence, such as the one that occurred in Bellavista, in a larger and longer conceptual and socio-historical formation, in a broader spatial configuration, and in a more complex structure of social systems.

Within this framework I attempt to historicize deracination by conceptualizing these experiences as one of the foundations of the Afro-Colombian Diaspora. Hence, I propose to place deracination in the time space realities in which it occurs. Doing so requires us to consider multiple social, geographical and historical dimensions and to disentangle the spatial, racial, gender, and class logics of deracination. This process allows us to understand how it impacts women, Afrodescendent and Indigenous populations; the local, the regional, the national, and the global context in which the history of this community has been developed. Finally, the impact of racism, sexism, patriarchy, and imperialism is also considered.

In the case of the massacre at Bellavista, we can see how processes of deracination render profound changes in a society suffering from the devastation wrought by such events as the disappearance or decrease of the population, the destruction of communities, as well as the relationships built with their territories. The effects of the deracination may become irreversible and irreparable in the cultural, economical, and political aspects of the community. These changes are seen in the negative transformation of the territorial configuration of rural communities.

Living through deracination strengthens the social mobilization of the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations. Hence, considering that the territory is an element that has been built, fought, and politicized, the problem of deracination involves a deterioration of the social condition of the subjects who are abruptly removed from their territories.

The descriptions of the experience of Bellavista in Chap. 3 allows us to see some of the features of this phenomenon, and the role of women in the creation of strategies to survive the act of violence and to rebuild the community. How can we move the lessons of this case forward? How can we move from discussing the impact of deracination on the bodies, in the communities, and territories to understand, for example, the role of deracination in the nation-state? What is the analytical scope of deracination as a category of historical analysis? Some answers to these questions lie in systematic historical analysis, an area that, while it has been widely studied, has been limited: the historiography of land acquisition, and territory making. I elaborate this argument in the following two sections.

It is imperative to answer the question of why the land in which Bellavista is located today has been systematically disputed in the course of the last four centuries. As I show in Table 2.1, underneath the contemporary old and new Bellavista and Vigía del Fuerte runs the blood of the Indigenous Kuna—disseminated in the sixteenth century—and of the Africans, Afrodescendants, diverse contemporary Indigenous communities, Chilapos, and Mestizos systematically disappeared, assassinated, uprooted, and deracinated in the subsequent centuries up until today. It is not only the same geographic space, but also the same racialized population, with its reconfigurations, and the same reconfigured discourses of marginalization. In such cases, the analytical framework of forced migration proves not only limited but ineffective for brining justice to these populations.

DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICS AND A METHOD TO STUDY THE QUESTION OF THE DERACINATION OF COLOMBIA

The remote region of Chocó, in the northwest of Colombia, has long been synonymous with poverty, backwardness, isolation and ignorance. Nonetheless, the region has also been a significant locale for the development of the feudal and capitalist economies of Spain and the United States since the sixteenth century (Archer 1937; Collins 1874; Sharp 1975; West 1957). The legacies of colonialism continue to profoundly affect the economic and social condition of the region. In the

Colombian colonial era, the inhabitants of this state were forced into slavery, and after independence and emancipation, they became servants in the upper-class houses of the country. These two roles—slavery and servitude—have been maintained through two further centuries, in which both Indigenous and Afrodescendants have been the targets of development policies, and recently, the victims of massive deracination.

I use the concept world-historical-emptied-space as a working analytical tool of world historical analysis to comprehend how the configuration of territories where conquest, exploitation, violence, deracination, politics for development, and contestation for liberation coexist and are covered by the mantle of the narratives of underdevelopment, marginality, and barbarity. Regions such as the Chocó have been represented economically as poor, racially as black and Indigenous, gendered as ‘virgin’ territories; and politically, socially and culturally as ‘backward.’ I am conceptualizing world-historical-emptied-spaces as the cradles of the colonality of power (Quijano 2000).¹

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

HOW DO THESE WORLD-HISTORICAL EMPTIED-SPACES AND THE SUBJECTS OF VIOLENCE FORM?

Anthropologist Veena Das argues that there are three components on the formation of the subject of violence: (a) discursive formations that make women victims of violence; (b) the experience of becoming a subject, linked to the experience of subjugation; (c) women’s own formation

of their subject positions (2001, 205). Building on this rational, I argue that to historicize land dispossession—with the aim of reparation—we need to describe two opposing logics in the conception of the land that are at play in the case of Bellavista. Describing these conceptions gets us to the center of how these spaces have been created as spaces of exploitation and as spaces of liberation.

Allow me to compare two excerpts to develop this statement:

The members of the Community Council COCOMACIA say:

Defending the land we defend our life, it is not our caprice, our ancestors have already done it. If today we are divided, and all dispersed, tomorrow whoever will come and will displace us all. Among us there is the war which is the greatest enemy that threatens our land. (COCOMACIA 2006)²

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

All this- land-at the beginning is nobodies land, but when people come and enter this region, and find gold immediately there is a display of plenty of owners ... they appear all off a sudden, and one without knowing they were owners ... one comes here because everybody does it; entering, exploring to see what can one find, and once people come to know that there is gold they start claiming they are the 'owners'. Owners in quotation mark because they don't have ownership titles.³

How are these competing visions possible? How can one describe the historical formation of the notion of collective and ancestral territory claimed by Afrodescendent and Indigenous communities of the Colombian Pacific? How does this historical description open a space for alternative epistemologies of dislocation?

HISTORICIZING DERACINATION: LAND ACQUISITION AND TERRITORY-MAKING IN THE ATRATO RIVER REGION

To start answering these questions, in this section I introduce a collection of notes on the construction of a state-of-the-art historiography of initiating practices of land acquisition and territory making. My aim is to concentrate on the practices of land acquisition and territories to substantiate the use of the concepts of deracination and diaspora. I develop

the model I proposed in the introduction: the D-T-D² cycle through the colonial, emancipation, independence, and post-emancipation periods. Most of the references that I found locate the period 1750–1850 as central to understanding the processes of the establishment of mines in Colombia. The population enslaved to do the mining was organized in slave gangs— *cuadrillas de esclavos*. A second major historical stage is located after the liberation of the enslaved population in 1851 until 1930, when they were forced to move to the Pacific coast to establish new communities. Finally, a third historical stage could be located from 1930 to today. I argue that by looking at the major ideas and practices related to the making of territories and the major descriptions of how these processes were drawn during these periods is central to moving forward a critical debate about contemporary dispute over land ownership, and the ongoing violent land dispossession.

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

*World-Historical-Emptied-Spaces: Thinking About the Bases
of Contemporary Processes of Deracination in the State of Chocó-
Colombia*

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

SPACES FOR EXPLOITATION: SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY REPORTS ABOUT THE CHOCÓ REGION

The literature produced to describe the history of the department of Chocó links it to the Spanish.

Empire-building era. Its place in this history is principally as a space exclusively destined for extracting gold.

In W. Sharp's account:

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

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, evidence indicates that 'explorers,' Spaniard officials, map readers, miners and priests interpreted the Chocó as an area open for exploration and colonialization. It is a constant in the documentation from this period to describe in detail the conditions of the environment, the weather, and the amount of resources available for exploration without mentioning the condition of the population—the organization and life of the communities that were established in the territory. In the colonial reports, the negation of the humanity of the Indigenous and African people led to the consideration of the area as a commodity and thus as property of the miners. The mapping of the region during these centuries concentrated solely on mines for exploitation and territories for expansion.

The *Description of the province of Zitara and the course of the Atrato River* was one of the most important reports of the explorers of the Atrato River in colonial Chocó. It constituted the main source of inquiry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about this territory. I found it useful to mark the main historical stages regarding the initiating practices of land distribution, land acquisition, and territory-making. Its introduction starts with the attempts of colonialization and the relation between Indigenous and Spaniards in the colonial period.

It states that:

In the sixteenth century several well known attempts to secure the Chocó, including those by Pascual Andagoya, Captain Melchor Velásquez, set the pattern for hardship and failure. (...) All three expeditions ended in disaster as an estimated two-thirds of the soldiers who entered to Chocó with the fanatical captain died of hunger, disease or Indian attack (...) Despite the hardships and examples of failure and death, gold continued to draw

adventurers. By the end of the seventeenth century soldiers, miners, priests and officials had conquered the Indians of the central Chocó. They did not defeat the Cuna Indians near the mouth of the Atrato River, but the Noanames and Chocoes, decimated by disease, tamed by friars, and herded into *corregimientos* by priests and soldiers, offered little resistance to future Spanish encroachment. (3)

Spaniards who entered to Chocó gave and contracted smallpox and were particularly susceptible to many tropical fevers. Because seventeenth-and-eighteenth century accounts describe the Chocó simply as fever-ridden (...). (4)

This suggests three dimensions that seem central to my reading of the significance of this description. First, the way in which the label of ‘empty territories’ served the purposes of empire building and how Spanish officials used it to legitimize killing of the native population and the proposal of projects to expand the domain of the empire. This initial moment is what the Spanish officials called exploration. Second, the complex structure of individuals and functions to make the process of exploitation/colonialization work; this is expressed in the sentence “soldiers, miners, priests and officials had conquered the Indians.” Third, the role of space-making in the process of exploitation and the use of violence; this is expressed in the sentences ‘indigenous disseminated’ offered little resistance to future Spanish encroachment.” Thus enunciated, the opposition made by the inhabitants is constructed as a savage act that has to be controlled while the territory is violently taken and exploited. These processes mark the initiating practices of land acquisition, while planting the basics of the historical and geographical representation of these territories. Thus, even though this region was central to the economic development of the Spanish Empire, it remained marginalized, isolated, and silenced. In this context, Boyd-Bowman and Sharp write:

Once miners actually began exploiting the place mines in the Chocó early in the eighteenth century, some lucky individuals reaped great fortunes. I have calculated elsewhere, using quinto records and estimates of contraband trade, that the total amount of gold extracted from the Chocó during the period 1680-1810 was worth approximately \$ 83,313.00 silver pesos. This figure while impressive even today (...). On today’s gold market the 416,565 lb of gold mined in the Chocó would be worth approximately (...) \$ 4,332,276,000 dollars. (4)

The violent and bloody settling in Chocó, the exploitation of its territories, and the establishment of mines brought a threat to the agents of the empire—the illegal exchange of gold. The description about how the Spanish Crown tried to prevent the contraband trade with the Dutch merchants brings an important category to this mapping on the constitution of these territories, and the narratives that accompany this geopolitical construction, which in part justifies the contemporary deracination of its inhabitants (Fig. 2.1).

Thus, Boyd-Bowman and Sharp say:

(u)nable to guarantee the loyalty of officials in this isolated gold producing region, Crown authorities sought instead to make illegal shipments to and from the providence easy to detect. (6)

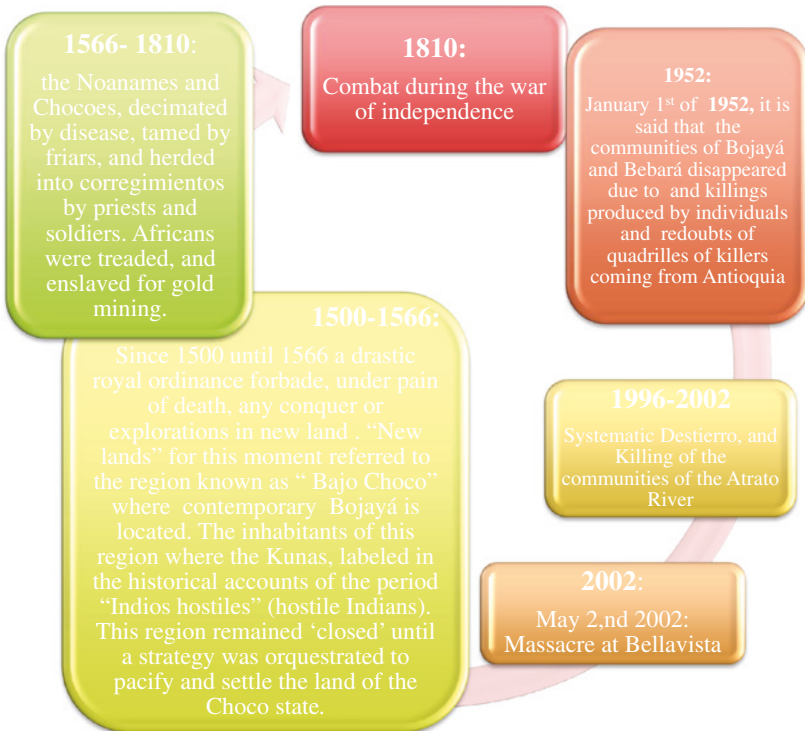


Fig. 2.1 Preliminary schema of historical events of deracination at the Bojayá region 1500–2002

Although the vigias did not prevent contraband trade, they did prevent the legal passage of merchandise, observers, and passengers into de Chocó by way of the river highways. (...) The Chocó was cut off from outside by geographical barriers and Crown regulations (...). Isolation, wealth and mystery continued as the prevailing view in the Chocó. (7)

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

The Boyd-Bowman and Sharp's report continues:

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

Furthermore, they point out:

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

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

is covered with the colonial narratives of marginality and non-humanity. This last idea is a challenge that scholars of the territorial construction and the processes of deracination will have to face and develop strategies and research agendas to overcome. These elements bring us to three fundamental aspects that have influenced the production of knowledge of this region: (a) the writing of its history; (b) the sources used; and (c) the final stories integrated as ‘official’ history.

Regarding the writing of the history of the state of Chocó, critiques that have been raised about the impact that the “prevention of good descriptions and maps of the region of Chocó” has on the historical process of writing its history. How has it helped to create and maintain the representations of backwardness, isolation, and marginality of this region? Second, on the matter of the sources, as this report indicates, most of the available sources were written to serve the requests of the Spanish Empire. When this is the case, other versions of the same stories remain silenced or tergiversated.

ON THE TRAJECTORIES OF TERRITORIAL SETTLEMENT AND THE PATTERNS OF LAND ACQUISITION

To historicize the trajectories of territorial settlement and the main patterns of land acquisition, J. Aprile (2004) proposes describing the past of the Pacific region to illuminate in a more comprehensive way the socio-spatial configuration of its territories. The author introduces essential periods for the comprehension of the process of settlement. He has divided it into three forms: “a) the aboriginal socio-spatial formations; b) the socio-spatial slave training and mining; and c) the socio-spatial formation of agricultural colonization” (275). Accordingly, he introduces a description of the multiple processes that led to the configuration of the modern socio-territorial organization. He suggests that the main features of this process are: (a) a socio-spatial formation of an agriculture-based colonization; (b) an endogenous colonization; and (c) a popular colonization of the jungle. Building on these previous descriptions, Sotomayor and Valderrama (1995) illustrate the process of the settlement of the communities of the Atrato River region.

They state:

the process of settlement is given by the flight and slave uprising, but this process is accentuated in the mid-eighteenth century, a period during which arose black villages of enslaved runaways or fugitives, who

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

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

In this period, black communities expand their economic alternatives to the exploitation of rubber, tagua, radicle and animal skins. During this period the state is concerned to establish a presence in the territory leading to the villages during the administration of justice, and religious education, creating new villages and prompting the growth of existing ones. In this period is defined the structure of the settlements and the territorial distribution of these as a line along the rivers, a pattern that still exists. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the territorial expansion of the black communities is completed the extraction cycle of the rai-cilla, the tagua, and caucho, and it is the beginning of the process of the strengthening of the occupation of the Medio Atrato. In this moment is founded Opogodó (1936). In this stage the mobility of black communities is intensified and new processes of the production land are incorporated. The most recent period is identified by the appearance of towns that are considered the extensions of older communities. This process looks for an appropriation of natural resources for subsistence by fewer people compared to the village core. Upon the occupation of the Spanish in what is now the municipality of Bojaya used to lived the Cuna Indian community, which also covered the Bajo Atrato. (Jimeno 1995)

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

The first period of colonization pressure by the Spanish led to the depletion of the indigenous population in the seventeenth century. Thus, the Spanish divided the territory into Indian provinces. Several groups were forced to work in the mines of the tributaries of the Atrato and San Juan

rivers. However, in the middle of the century, there were indigenous rebellions that swept the colonial towns and mining centers, culminating in the massive displacement to remote lands especially in the headwaters of rivers and coasts of the Pacific Ocean. Throughout the centuries of Spanish presence there were numerous indigenous movements forcing them to relocate, merge or driving them to extinction. It should be mentioned that cultural changes in indigenous social groups have been as a result of a historical process by the formation of clusters, loss of control over territory and evangelism. During this process the transformation of their production systems takes place by introducing livestock and in general to join the social systems of Spanish and black communities. The creation of the Municipality of Bojayá comprises relatively recent settlements; the oldest is La Boa created in 1883, and Bellavista the municipal capital that was established in 1946. However, the creation of the municipality as a territorial entity was given with Ordinance No. 13 of 12 December 1960.⁴

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

ON THE FORMS OF LAND TENURE

Robert West (1957) asserts that:

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

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

ON THE FORMS OF LAND ACQUISITION AND STATE FORMATION

Formally established royal ordinances or laws influenced the multiple patterns of land use and land acquisition presented here. The end of the colonial state brought intense conflicts over land ownership that marked and oriented the course that these patterns took. To explore this question and integrate it into the study of slavery, S. Mosquera argues that it is frequent in the studies of slavery to omit the legislative aspect of it. In this sense, he presents a set of archival documents in which the rights of possession, ownership, and property of both enslaved and lands are explained.

He introduces the legislative aspects of colonialization in Colombia to explore the importance of the social classification of the population coming out from slavery and goes on to the narrative of the building of the nation. He describes the enslaved as an object of right, the modernization of the Spanish empire, the set of laws that made the abolition of slavery possible, to end up explaining the main gendered discourses that de-constructed the colonial state and built *La República*. In that sense, he introduces the constitutional changes and major global historical events of the period under review in this chapter. Thus, between 1815 and 1853 these processes of land acquisition are going to be cut across several legal changes. Mosquera summarizes them:

The Congress of Vienna of 1815 and the Royal Cedula of 1817 on the prohibition of the slave trade of the Spanish dominions, the law of 28 May of 1821 on the freedom of childbirth, the Constitution of the Republic of Colombia of 30 August of 1821, Constitution of the Republic of

Colombia of 29 April 1830, Constitution of the State of New Granada of 29 February 1832, regulation of the law of childbirth in Law 29 May 1842, the Constitution of the Republic of New Granada on 20 April 1843, the dismantling of the colonial state with the abolition of slavery law of 21 May 1851, and the Political Constitution of New Granada of 30 May 1853.

With the end of the colonial state these constitutional changes were followed by policies of recolonization or, more specifically, law prescriptions to keep the domination in these territories. The major pieces of law were the Resolution of November 22, 1888 on the granting of uncultivated lands to informers of Mines, and the Resolution on Uncultivated Land, July 28, 1894 on preferences between two informers, among others (until 1905), which are covered in this book.⁵

Following Le Grand (1988), there are two major epochs that should also be mentioned. It is important to tie to the processes of land acquisition—which took place in the nascent state of Chocó between 1827–1873—with legislation that was designated to ease the fiscal crisis in Colombia (costs of independence) and to strengthen the land titles of big landowners. Also, it is important to recognize that, between 1874 and 1930, the importance of the economy of the border.

Then, laws 61 of 1874 and 48 of 1882 established that the land should belong to those who cultivate the lands. Title was given through free grants to those who had worked and occupied the land for a period of at least five years. However, the high transaction costs of certification and the local political strength of landlords prevented the formalization of the property rights of farmers. This is an important evidence of the inequalities born in these conditions.

In addition, Webster F. McBryde's piece (1969), building from the description of human ecology of Chocó argues that:

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

In Don Melchor de Barona y Betancourt y la esclavización en el Chocó, S. Mosquera (2004) describes the arrival of the national revolution to Chocó in 1813, where the provinces of the time claimed their independence and constituted the town councils of Nóvita and Citará. I argue that these political and economic environments had to mean something to the processes of land acquisition, but they are not mentioned in the literature that describe the processes. The diaries of the travelers display evidence of this omission. Thus, the author cites the disarticulation of the economy of the Nueva Granada after 1810 and the systematic impoverishment of the rich, of what it meant to the enslaved and runaways in their projects of liberation as unexplored questions.

“DEVELOPMENTIZABLE” SPACES

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

Arturo Escobar’s account states that:

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

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

In 1993, a project funded by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank called “Plan Pacífico also took place. At the same time the policy document entitled Agenda Pacífico XXI and the Proyecto Bio Pacífico were arranged as initiatives to preserve, develop and modernized

the biodiverse Pacific.” These policy prescriptions were made at the same time that the Law 70 of 1993 or Black communities’ law was being institutionalized. This law was the product of a constitutional change based on the mobilizations of indigenous and afrodescendants organizations both in the rural and urban areas. The Law 70 of 1993 gave to the afrodescendent communities the legal frame to legalize their territories, to structure ethno- education, an Afrocolombian Cathedral, as well, it states the autonomy of the communities to rule their lives in their territories.

SPACES FOR DERACINATION

Thus, the spaces for deracination came to be. The establishment of the law and the beginning of the development projects inaugurated a new era of death and constituted the spaces for deracination. From 1996 to 2002 in the Bajo Atrato region, for every community council meeting (the minimal structure to legalize a portion of the territory), there was a massacre, a collective deracination, or a set of indiscriminate killings. The massacre of Bellavista is just one of those examples.

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

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

He states that:

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

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

It is also imperative considering that:

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

In light of this historical evidence, I speak of emptied territories and geographies of death, following the reasoning of A. Mbembe, J. Vargas and J. Alves to understand the configuration of territories where colonization, exploitation, violence, banishment, policies for development, and resistances for liberation coexist; covered by the mantle of narratives of underdevelopment, marginality and barbarism. A. Mbembé (2003) argues “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11).

J. Vargas and J. Alves (2010) “deploy the concept of geography of death to investigate the multi-layered aspects of state-sanctioned lethal violence perpetrated by, but not limited to, the police force. This entails a consideration of at least three types of factor: actual violent acts, their symbolic dimensions and the historical and structural conditions within which violence emerges.” (611). These concepts are useful for studying regions, such as Chocó, that have been economically represented as poor, racially as Black and Indigenous, in terms of gender as virgin territory, pending exploration, and socioculturally as backward.

These representations extend to the human beings who inhabit them, and sometimes their is not questioned, thus reproducing prejudices and stereotypes that impact narratives and ethnic-racial images.

The systematic killing of its population and the appropriation of the land and natural resources have marked the history of the state of Chocó. Therefore, a sociological account of the massacre at Bellavista cannot overlook that history. Describing the collective actions undertaken by the inhabitants of the community of Bellavista-Bojayá is particularly important. This community experienced one of the most tragic massacres of the beginning of the twenty-first century in the Americas—the output

of this event forced all its residents to acquire the status of ‘displaced’ people.’ After four months away, the people returned to Bellavista; and five years after their return, the project of resettlement of this population ended in the construction of the New Bellavista, making it one of the few such communities to have a satisfactory return to their land.

Studying this case has a special importance as a chance to analyze the implications of emptying the history of territories, like those of the Chocoan Pacific. With this massacre, 119 people died, and more than 100 human beings were injured. This event transformed the way of life in this community, its daily life, the use of its territory and the distribution of the population in its space.

However, the spaces for deracination are at the same time spaces of contestation and struggle for liberation. Studying them reveals how these spaces created as empty are actually full of people, albeit marginalized people, with a determined race, gender, class, and location that make them objects of the coloniality of power, objects of exploitation, politics of development, and violence, and at the same time subjects of resistance and liberation. I expand on these aspects on Chaps. 3 and 4.

NOTES

1. The concepts of coloniality and the coloniality of power were coined by Anibal Quijano. See Quijano (1989, 1991, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). I am using it as a tool to comprehend the world-historical patterning of power in the *longue durée* of historical capitalism; as a specific attribute of the modern regimes of power.
2. “Defendiendo el territorio, defendemos nuestra vida, no es capricho de nosotros, los ancestros ya lo hacían, pero si hoy nos dividimos, y todos nos dispersamos, mañana llega cualquiera y todos nos desplazamos. Es que también tenemos entre nosotros la guerra que es el enemigo más grande que amenaza nuestra tierra” (COCOMACIA, 2006).
3. Jorge Martínez, Administrador Mina- Comunidad Villanueva-Municipio Lloró-Chocó- Documental Chocó-La quimera del Oro/Colombia. Rutas de la Solidaridad, documental- Igor Olateta. — “Todo esto-la tierra- en un principio no tiene dueño pero cuando la gente viene y entra a esta región cualquier persona encuentra un poquito de Oro inmed iatamente aparecen infinidad de dueños...aparecen de un momento a otro sin saber que eras dueños...porque uno se entra aquí porque todo el mundo lo hace. Entrando, explorando a ver que se consigue y ya cuando se llega a saber que existe oro aparecen los dueños. Entre comillas dueños porque no hay títulos.”

4. <http://www.bojaya-choco.gov.co/nuestromunicipio>. Own translation.
5. Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Fomento. *Recopilación de las leyes y disposiciones vigentes sobre tierras baldías*. Bogotá. 1907

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