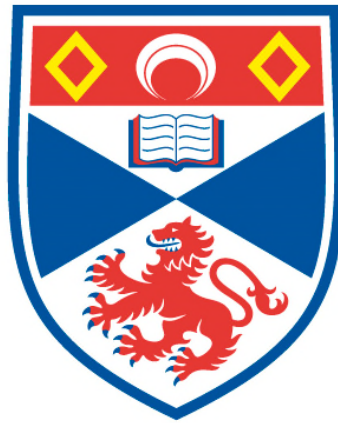


**BRIDGING WORLDS:
MOVEMENT, RELATEDNESS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN
TWO COMMUNITIES OF CARTAGENA DE INDIAS BAY**

Cristina Basso

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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**Bridging worlds: movement, relatedness and social change in two
communities of Cartagena de Indias Bay**

Cristina Basso



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD

at the

University of St Andrews

05/12/2014

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Abstract

The island of Barú, located along the Atlantic coast of Colombia, has occupied, since the colonial era, a geographical and social interstitial position. The island was a strategic space in key processes and events of colonial and national modernity. Its inhabitants have combined movement and interaction across geographical spaces and social groups with retreat and relative closure.

The historical experiences of dislocation and of marginality have shaped local modes of relatedness and particular ways of signifying and narrating “family”, masculinities and femininities, the divine and the wondrous.

State and capital’s progressive encroachment over the Island trans-territory has recently undergone a conspicuous acceleration. Moreover, new religious organizations have influenced the ways in which people think and talk about identity, local forms of sociality and religiosity.

“Development” and ethnicity-based identity politics have functioned as identity-, community- and memory (re-)making devices. Various political and economic actors currently envision and try to implement projects of “place” which commoditize the island and aim to reshape local subjectivities and relational modes according to market-oriented values.

Acknowledgements

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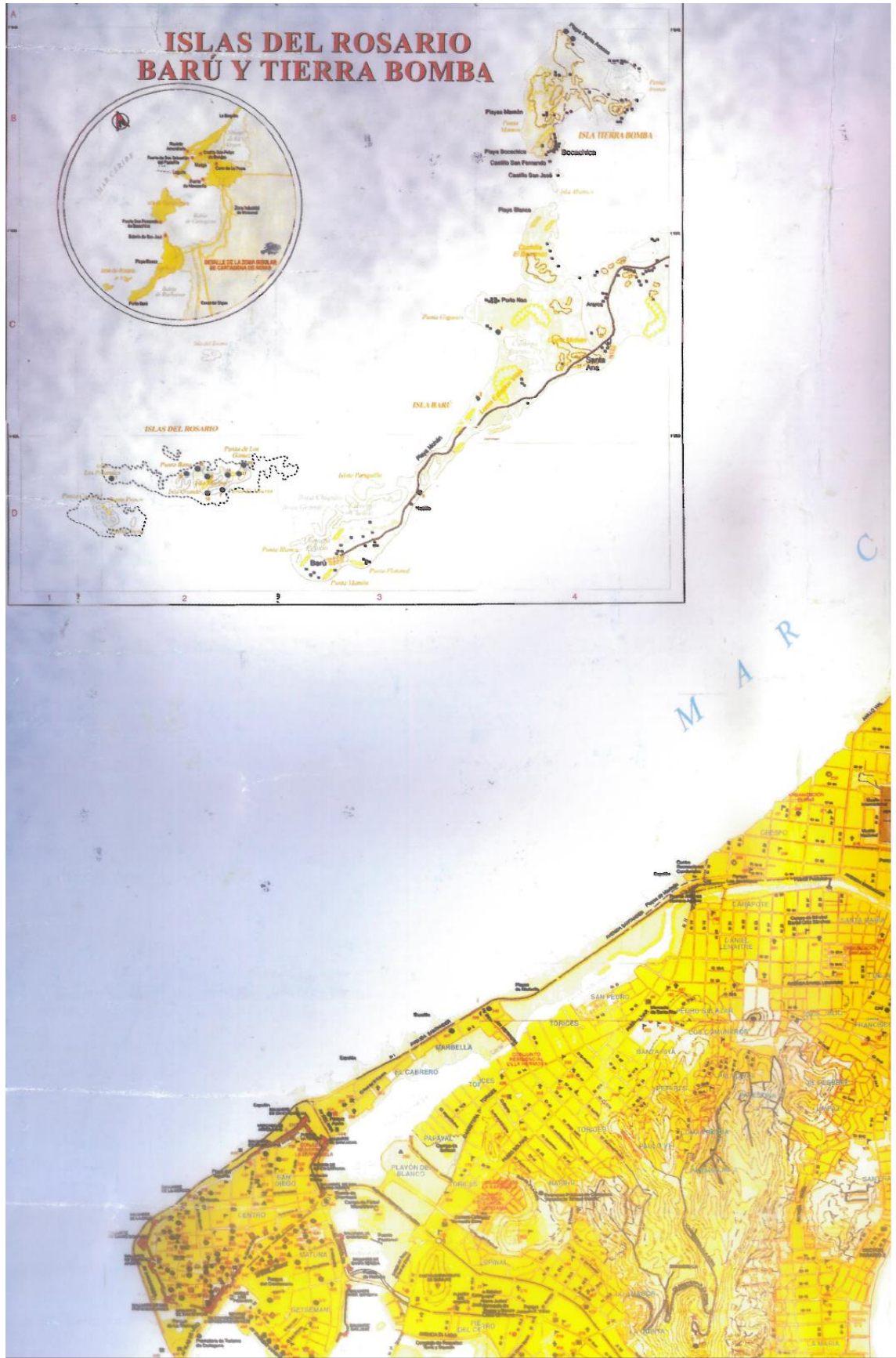
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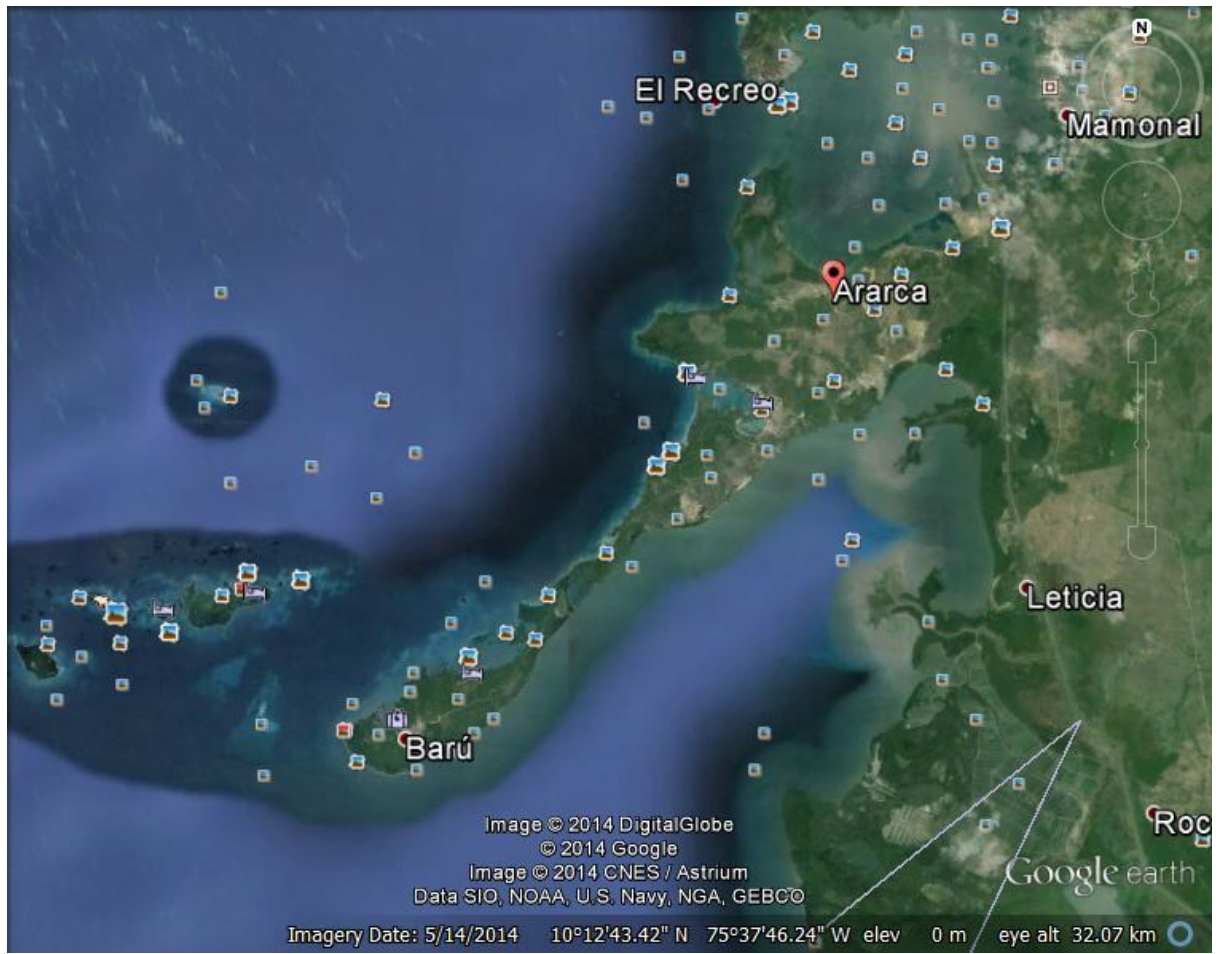
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“The people nowadays have an idea about ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done...But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began...if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing...At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies...Things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more”

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*



Plan of Cartagena de Indias and of its islands. Courtesy of Funsarep.



The Island which was not an Island

Living in the margins: Introduction

At the beginning of my fieldwork Cartagena's mayor was a woman, originally from the neighbouring department of Córdoba, who had campaigned using a nickname otherwise indicative of a garrulous local bird. The "*María mulata*", as the *alcaldesa* was referred to, had chosen as a slogan for her campaign the catch phrase: "*Por una sola Cartagena*" ("For a single Cartagena"). The young and graceful mayor promised to close the gap between the city of the poor and the city of fabulous riches. Cartagena has indeed been—and still is—many different cities. And it has also existed as different cities at the same time. More importantly, as Libardo Sarmiento Anzola, a Cartagenero social researcher has repeatedly argued, Cartagena's skyscrapers and shantytowns are not only two sides of a coin; they also are mutually constitutive city-scapes (2010). Cartagena is the city of endless and imaginative *rebusque* (informal economic activity) because it also is the City of spatial segregation, where the economic domination of an expendable and pliable labour force is exercised by a small local and, more recently, (trans-)national-elite.

At the beginning of the 16th century the City was a modest settlement used as a base for the gold-searching expeditions which depredated and destroyed many indigenous towns of the *Tierra Firme*. It slowly turned into the most important port of the Spanish Empire. Goods, adventurers, prospective settlers, traders, information and dreams, news and tales converged towards the growing City and were dispersed, from its port and its rapidly inter-connecting sets of islands, to other parts of Nueva Granada and of the Spanish Empire and across the Atlantic. Cartagena also turned into the principal arrival point of the commoditized workforce of Euro-American modernity: the enslaved Africans which in Cartagena were made to disembark, dutifully baptized, sold and transported to other regions of the continent. Legal transatlantic trade and a ponderous flow of unofficial trans-Caribbean (and transcontinental) commerce had in Cartagena its main hub. The official cargoes of African slaves destined for the plantations, mines and households of the entire empire entered the American continent through Cartagena while in Cartagena gold, silver and precious tropical species were embarked for their voyage across the Atlantic. Cartagena was a crux in a complex network of regional trade which connected the City with Santa Marta, Riohacha, Coro and La Guaira (Caracas), Curaçao and the Lesser Antilles, Yucatán (and Asia through Nueva España/Mexico) Cuba, Jamaica, Dominican Republic/Haiti and with other Caribbean ports (Vidal Ortega, 2002) and, through riverine navigation, with the Pacific Coast, with the river-basins of the Colombian interior and with the lake of Maracaibo. For centuries the City and its Bay occupied a paramount position. At a time when people and goods had to travel for weeks and months on mules scurrying up and down the mountains in order to reach the Andean regions, Cartagena constantly received and blended products, peoples, music, ideas, customs, news and rumours from across rivers, seas and oceans.

As a result, Cartagena's Province has been, from the beginnings of the Spanish conquest, as Margarita Serje (2011) argued in her fundamental study of the Colombian Frontier, a space of "projection" and "mystification", an idealized and demonized territory, a space of possibility and fascination and of mystery and terror. In the colonial era, the Province and the frontier coincided. The wild space of the frontier, its opportunities and its dangers lurked just outside the City. In the province food was grown; smuggling had its crucial unofficial ports, coves and routes; wood for the City was collected and charcoal, lime and bricks for its houses; churches and fortifications were made. In the Province lay the *estancias* and *fincas* which were the material base for the

fortunes of the land-owning elites. The vast Province held the mines and the pearls, the trees and the animals whose appropriation and exploitation created capital and commerce. But the Province, the Frontier, was also the unknown and potentially deadly dwelling place of weakened and fragmented, but not annihilated, indigenous groups (and especially of those with the fiercest reputation, like the Guajiros-Wayuus), also of free blacks, poor whites, indigenous and black maroons, deserters and other runaways seeking refuge and trying to craft and preserve a more autonomous socioeconomic and spiritual territory in their *palenques*, *sitios* and *rochelas*ⁱ (Meisel Roca, 1979; Fals Borda, 1973; Bell Lemus, 1991).

The XVII century construction of the Dique Channel and the 1930s Paricuica opening transformed Barú, a narrow peninsula, formerly part of Cartagena's mainland, into an island. With approximately seven thousands hectares of hills, marshes, streams, otherwise known as *monte* (non-urban, vegetation-filled space). From here onwards I will refer to the estancias, *fincas*, coves and natural ports of Barú as the Island. The island is nonetheless still part of the City's territory (the villages of Ararca, and Barú are included as part of the *corregimiento*, (administrative district) of Santa Ana).

Throughout the centuries the Island has been celebrated, condemned and exploited as a storehouse, a shelter, a secluded harbour, a space of economic production and political manoeuvre and, recently, as a touristic paradise located “just around the corner”. The Island has always been part of the City's horizon and for centuries those who live on it have found themselves positioned at the margin. When I use the terms “margin” and “marginal” I am following bell hooks and Nadia Seremetakis, who despite speaking from distinct social and geographical positions and with somewhat different results, have similarly engaged with historical domination and with the social experiences of discontinuity and fragmentation. For bell hooks (1989) the margins are spaces of “radical openness” and of resistance, of possibilities for “counterhegemonic practice”. hook's “marginality” comes from “lived experience” but it is also actively sought after and maintained. It is a space for cultivating and voicing difference and opposition. Marginality allows (and somehow predisposes to) a creative and often subjective mix of strategic acceptance and defiance, of participation and distancing. Margins are formed and transformed by a variety of social and historical experiences. They therefore constitute a space akin to Homi Bhabha's “threshold” or “third space” (1994), a space of exploration, performance, negotiation, a space for alliances between differently marginal subjectivities.

I have also drawn inspiration from Nadia Seremetakis (1991), who is concerned with the “empowering poetics of the periphery”. She wrote about fast disappearing female practices—divination, funerary poetry—which she considered as the “poetics of the fragment”. Although there do not seem to be, in Seremetakis' representations of marginality, as many possibilities for struggling against historical disempowerment as in hooks' theorization, Seremetakis nevertheless argues that those who dwell within the fragments and through the fragments—as rural women, in her Greek ethnography—can, despite and because of their peripheral position, “deny recognition to any centre”. The historical experience of peripherally positioned peoples is one of “discontinuity” and “break” but these have often devised cultural practices through which social and historical discontinuity can be temporarily and regularly overcome and interpreted as constitutive part and , simultaneously, result of a system of unequal power relations.

Islanders have, throughout the centuries, interacted with wealthy landowners, foreign smugglers, indigenous peoples, sailors and travellers, celebrities, politicians and *narcos* (drug traffickers). Their labour has often been exploited, while their capacity for crafting meaningful relationships which bypass and re-signify the hierarchical *sociedad de castas* and the post-colonial regime of racial and class-based discrimination has sometimes eased the entrance, into the island, of individuals who have cheated and robbed its inhabitants. At the same time many islanders have found ways of cultivating and taking advantage of friendships, “alliances” and interactions with other peoples.

The same territory has been shaped by the horror of slavery and of the colonial *encomienda* and by the self- and community-preserving practice of creating “common lands” (*pro indiviso*). Barú has been the island of the smuggled goods of trans-Caribbean modernity (and, before, of the, for the most part, smuggled workforce of colonial modernity), an experimental terrain for a host of other state and nation-making hegemonic practices. It has been an island which sheltered and helped liberal rebels as well as a *sitio* or *rochela* which preoccupied colonial authorities have wanted to depopulate (Conde Calderón, 1996). It has been the first place in which XVIII century resettlement and concentration campaigns have been implemented and, nevertheless, and until recently, a trans-territory of journeys and interactions, of “walking”, migrating and sailing women and men. Islanders’ lives have been positively and negatively conditioned by territorial and social marginality. Marginality has been perceived, lived, interpreted, recounted, by different peoples and in different moments, as abandonment and neglect and/or as opportunity and freedom. Some of the cultural practices, the worldviews and the relational patterns islanders have been crafting through time—rather as the divination and the female funerary compositions examined by Seremetakis—have preserved memory and radical, counterhegemonic interpretations of global/regional history. To pay attention to them means then to “identify the scattered fragments as a system, and [...] to make a political statement” (Seremetakis, 1991, p.236)

The entry of the state and capital into the Island has been gradual. Some island land was given to various influential Spanish (and especially Andalusian) conquistadors early on as *encomienda*. Juan de Viloria, who was related through marriage to Pedro de Heredia, Cartagena’s founder, was the first *encomendero* of the island (Bossa Herazo, 1969). The conquerors’ chronicles have recorded the name of the cacique of Bahaire, Dahoa, and narrated scantily his doomed struggles against the Spaniards and his forced “compliance” with their plans, in which, so the story goes, the rival cacique of the neighbouring island of Tierra Bomba, Carex, and that island’s *mohán* (shaman/wise man) Carón played a fundamental role (Herrera Angel, 1993). From Barú came indigenous peoples deported to La Española (Haiti/Dominican Republic) as forced plantation labour after Queen Isabella became convinced, in 1502, to pass down a provision against the rebels and the “cannibals” of *Tierra Firme* (Vidal Ortega, 2002). In the seventeenth century, in the Island, there were *estancias* (Cocón, Coquito, Estancia Vieja, Santa Ana, San Antonio de Polonia) in which cattle was raised, food and wood produced; from these the precious lime with which the City’s fortifications were built was sent to the City. Smuggled goods and smuggled human cargoes were disembarked on the island and powerful peoples—merchants and colonial authorities—used its natural harbours, streams and coves for their unofficial trade, a practice which was facilitated by their possession of land in this and other islands (Like Tierrabomba) of the Bay (Ruiz Rivera, 2007; Grahn 1995). Poor white peasants, free blacks and *mestizos*, and, occasionally, indigenous women and men, lived within and around the *estancias* and sometimes worked in them

(Meisel Roca, 1979). Their practices and activities probably differed little from those of the black slaves, their *rozas* (small cultivated land plots) may have been adjacent to those that the slaves themselves were allowed to keep and work upon on certain days(*ibid.*).

In the second half of the XVIII Century the Bourbons implemented in the Spanish Colonies a series of centralizing reforms. In the province of Nueva Granada the authorities sent military and religious authorities to the rural regions, starting from the territories which were close to the city and could have been used (in fact they usually were) by enemies as points of entry or as headquarters for laying siege to Cartagena or for interrupting the flow of provisions from the countryside to the city. Antonio de la Torre y Miranda was put in charge of the expeditions which sought to alter the *arrochelados*' ways of life in the Province of Cartagena. His diary is an extraordinary document. It starts with the captain's journey to the island of Barú, where he founded the city of Santa Ana and tried to convince local people, who lived in dispersed communities in the *monte*, of the benefits of leading a "civilized" life. Like Father Baltazar de la Fuente, who had visited Cartagena's province at the beginning of the 1690s and who ended his journey in Barú, Torre was convinced that the *arrochelados* lived an unproductive life within this harsh geography of the periphery. These were territories of con-fusion and dis-order. Women and men fished together in the night, daughters, mothers and sisters were not properly looked after and didn't show the modesty required of Christian women. Some people seemed content to live "under a tree" and many indulged in scandalous dances and other unholy practices. Antonio de la Torre y Miranda who did not seem to understand why the *arrochelados* kept disobeying his orders—leaving the Monte, moving to the newly traced city—felt forced to resort to military repression in order to congregate people in Santa Ana. It would obviously be absurd to think that he managed to gather all the dispersed population in the new town (Lucena Giraldo, 1993).

Before its abolition, in 1851, slavery had already lost importance in this part of the Nueva Granada. Large-scale plantations, like those of other Caribbean settings, never existed in the Colombian Caribbean and the introduction of Spanish Brandy had made the few sugar-cane enterprises of Cartagena's rural areas almost useless (Meisel Roca, 1979). What is more important, the city had always had a huge population of free blacks and *mestizos* who could be exploited as waged labour. The slavery-based hacienda slowly metamorphosed into the socioeconomic formation which Fals Borda, in his monumental *Historia doble de la Costa* defines as "feudal hacienda" (Fals Borda, 1973; 1979; 1987). The "feudal haciendas" of the second half of XIX century retained some of the labour relations of pre-abolition times, although disguised which new provisions which apparently aimed to apprentice and protect young freed blacks until the age of 18 or of 25. They implemented other, restrictive policies, limiting labourer autonomy, exacting tribute from them; in many cases turning them into perpetually indebted subjects thereby re-insinuating servitude into the local social and economic fabric (Fals Borda, 1975; 1987).

Cartagena's black and white creoles meanwhile engaged in pro-independence political activities and military struggles at the beginning of XIX century. The City won independence from the Spanish and lived a short but glorious moment of regional autonomy (Republica de Cartagena, 1812-1815). It was subsequently reconquered by the empire in the notorious *Reconquista* led by Pablo Morillo, which brought devastation and initiated Cartagena's long and painful economic decline in its wake. After the constitution of the Colombian state, centred in and run from the Andes, ideas of (and desires for) a unified, autonomous, distinct Caribbean region, disappeared from the political scene. The

new state, already indebted to the individuals, groups and nations which had supported the struggle against Spain, conceived the system of the “territorial bonuses” (*bonos territoriales*), with which it gave out vast extensions of land in order to pay its creditors (Patino, 1997). So it was that, from the second half of the XVIII century on, the (prevalently black, *mestizo* and *zambo*) inhabitants of the rural regions had to cope with progressive waves of privatization, arbitrary and fraudulent “fencing”, eviction and dispossession (Tovar Pinzón, 1997; Pérez Martínez, 2004; Bernal Castillo, 2012)

The 1920s were the years of Cartagena’s industrial expansion and of the City’s resurgence from the recession in which it had plunged with the 1815 *Reconquista*. The oil Industry reshaped the city’s territory. The Andian Corporation, an offshoot of US-based Standard Oil opened its offices in the City and started building a pipeline connecting production centres to the Mamonal area, in the outskirts of Cartagena. The Bocagrande and Laguito neighbourhoods, which were to host Andian’s managers and their families, were built at this time (Sarmiento Anzola, 2010). Avenues were carved out of ancient walls and popular sites, whose inhabitants were in turn forced to resettle elsewhere. The forties saw the beginning of the tourism era. The City has continued to rearrange the territorial coordinates of the power relations which shape its socioeconomic life.

Struggles for the right use the “*baldíos*” (public land, traditionally held together and used by peasants) continued throughout the 20th century. Under the “Liberal Republic” (1936-1945), poor peasants had been given the possibility of registering the plots they occupied (but not owned, as there is a difference, in Colombian law, between *propiedad* and *posesión*, between owning and “possessing”/occupying) provided that they could demonstrate it was being exploited and that they had the means to have the required measurements taken. Paradoxically, the brief and limited opportunities of the Liberal republic’s policies caused a host of evictions, as landowners wanted to avoid paying the required compensations to the peasants whose lands they had claimed (Pérez Martínez, 2004). Evicted peasants were later hired as waged labour, a pattern which people in the small villages still often remember and recount, since this pattern of rural proletarianization has often accompanied, even in more recent times, massive land “sales” and dispossession.

The period known as the “*apertura económica*” promoted and implemented under Samper’s Government (mid-nineties), when the bulk of neoliberal policies were introduced and implemented, coincided with a renewed interest in the Bay’s islands, whose economic potential had already been weighed and pondered over by wealthy *costeño* businessmen and members of the local elite, some of whom had got to know and appreciate the insular territory while fishing, had subsequently “acquired” land in the Island or in the neighbouring Islands of Rosario (which have always been considered part of Barú’s territory), and then built holiday houses there for themselves.

During my fieldwork (2011, 2012) “development”, it seemed, had definitely landed on the Island. “Big things are coming”, many islanders proclaimed and repeated as a protective mantra. Other, perhaps less optimistic, villagers mused over the opportunities and the dangers of the *desarrollo* (development). Few doubted that huge changes would take place. Some wondered who would reap its alleged benefits. Almost all the collectively owned family land had been sold already. A few elderly individuals kept some land which, in some cases, continued to lend to and share with other villagers. Stories circulated widely about the frauds, threats and violence which had accompanied often obscure land transfers. The current wave of “fencing” evoked other, older cycles of

dispossession. Legal contentions had been intensifying for years and Ararca, Santa Ana and Barú had already had for some years their respective community councils (*Consejos Comunitarios*). Pacific Rubiales (filial of the Canadian Pacific) had started to build a gigantic storage and exporting terminal for hydrocarbons near the port of Bahaire, by the Dique Channel and just some kilometres outside of Ararca.

Other massive touristic projects, implemented by private capital and by the creative public-private joint ventures whose merits current neoliberal rhetoric preaches for, were being realized near Santa Ana and (another) small luxury hotel was being built near Barú by Aviatur, the leading Colombian travel company, whose main shareholder owned land near the village. The main road, which traversed the island, was being repaired, asphalted and in some parts of the island, built from scratch, by a previously uninterested State which had now been reprimanded and reminded of its duties (supporting development) by solicitous capital sectors. Plans had been made to build a bridge (now completed while I am writing this) which would connect the island with the neighbouring *corregimiento* of Pasacaballos. A host of NGOs had arrived. Various kinds of meetings and events took place. The “prior consultations” which Law 70 dictates (Law 70 recognized the existence of “black communities” and prescribes mandatory cycles of consultation between state institutions, representatives of companies interested in realizing development projects within “ethnic” territories and Black Communities Councils) had gone ahead, although, often, amidst accusations and conflicts. Current issues led people to think about the past. The concerns and the discourses of the present became a springboard for reflecting on fundamental aspects of the Island’s social life.

Peripheral positions (like the inhabitants of peripheries themselves) are suspended within distinct perceptions of specific, geographical and historical possibilities and disadvantages. Different individuals perceive and narrate “marginality” as a mix of positives and negatives. When I started to think about “marginality” as a site where both the experience of freedom and of dispossession and neglect could be lived and narrated I was reminded of Chela Sandoval’s (2000) book about the post-modern condition, power and resistance. Sandoval draws on Foucault, Jameson’s and others, visualizing post-modern power as a horizontally operating force whose current manifestation contrast with previous, modern, vertical dynamics. “Horizontal” power does not work through up and down relations but instead acts upon individuals, groups and territories through shifts between centres and margins. It is the realm of strategic alliances and junctures, of the intersections between different kinds of social category-based discrimination, whose mutual constitution makes oppression and inequality more difficult to recognise, voice and contrast, while leaving gaps and blank spaces, border spaces, where oppositional consciousness and practices can germinate and unfurl.

I was forced to consider the idea that places like the Island seemed to have been simultaneously entangled within a modern and a post-modern condition (or a post-national one, as in Carnegie’s work (2002) about Caribbean mobility). Islanders were at the same time experiencing state and capital’s encroachment, which attempted to make and control modern subjectivities, nuclear families, responsible and predictable citizens but also the uncertainty of neoliberal post-modernity. The modern, civilized, responsible economic subject evoked by economic initiatives, projects and political and corporative rhetoric lived and worked amidst precariousness and uncertainty. According to the nowadays flamboyant neoliberal rhetoric actively promoted by most Colombian institutions, villagers, like the urban poor, had to learn to create opportunities, materialize

work, see peoples, resources and relations in terms of capital and assets, despite having little control over the terms of their engagement with the state and with corporations and few tools to make out the borders between regional, national and transnational, between local and global, private and public. I was curious to explore the ways in which past and present constraints (and “openings”) shape and transform the ways in which islanders perceive, remember and narrate their territory, their sociality, their relationship with the wondrous and the divine.

My fieldwork took place between spring 2011 and summer 2012. I had visited Colombia and Cartagena’s region before but, nevertheless, it took some time for me to decide that the Island of Barú would be my fieldwork setting. Before visiting the Island I had already been to several villages, around the city and near the towns of Turbaco, Arjona and Marialabaja. Later I realized that those visits had indeed already formed part of my fieldwork. It was thanks to them and to the persons who guided me and showed me around, and thanks to the conversations I had in the City about prospective fieldwork settings within the Province of Cartagena, that I started to engage with the materially, relationally and discursively complex world of the Island itself.

I had initially chosen to conduct fieldwork solely in the village of Barú. Nevertheless I also felt drawn towards little Ararca and its history. I had met a young *Ararquera*, Carmelina, who had been part of the Community Council, and she introduced me to two of her aunts. I had felt very comfortable with them and for some time I could not decide where to stay. I then gradually realized that I could spend my time between Ararca and Barú. I think I had felt bound by the stereotype of singular and small village-centred research—despite what I had read and discussed, like most PhD Candidates all over the world, about multi-local fieldworks and “mobile” ethnographies. After some trips to, from and between the two villages (and Santa Ana, which lies in the middle) I decided that the “real thing” had already started. I would divide my time between the two villages. Ararca was in reality a small place essentially an attachment of the administrative *corregimiento* of Santa Ana. I could stay with one of Carmelina’s aunt, who lived by the main the road. I would then have the chance to explore the connections between the two villages and to reflect on the differences. I would thus live at the two extremes of the Island. The northern tip where Ararca is situated had already been designated as an industrial appendix of the mainland, and a harbour for the storage and the distribution of hydrocarbons was being slowly built on a vast area of previously thick *monte*. It stood by the sea and the port of Bahaire, a brownish extension of empty land ready to be filled with industrial facilities. Contrastingly, the southern tip of the Island, Barú, which was much more difficult to reach by land when I began doing fieldwork, and which was simultaneously part of the Bay of Cartagena and external to this, had been appointed to the role of a round the corner quasi-pristine Paradise.

Barú stood opposite the Islands of Rosario, which had hosted celebrities, *narcos* and politicians. Surrounding the village (people called most of them “*islas*”, islands, because plots of land are often separated/ joined by marshes and water-channels, in the area) a proliferation of holiday houses could be seen, as well as small and exclusive country and boutique hotels. The Bahía de Cholón, where some Baruleros, made a living by cooking and selling food for rich yacht-owners, even possessed the (debatable) honour of hosting the first luxury floating hotel in Colombia. Ararca and Barú seemed different, then. I was faced with a demanding task but also with a good opportunity to perceive and

reflect on a complex socio-economic geography by taking into consideration these distinct nodal points.

Fieldwork was not easy for me. I resented being considered, and referred to as, a tourist or as a potential land buyer. I felt people's curiosity and, often, their distrust. For a long time, travelling from one village to another and from Cartagena to the Island would make me nervous. Everybody assumed I wanted to travel to the resort of Playa Blanca and so I was asked to pay exorbitant fees for transportation. I fought with boatmen, moto-taxi drivers and with my own ambiguous sentiments. Within the villages, and especially in Ararca, people also used to think I was working for some NGO. I was asked who was going to pay for my work or, occasionally, what was the name of my "*fundación*". I felt that most people did not understand what I was doing in the Island and that some found suspicious my awkward explanations and my constant "walking" and snooping around under the unmerciful sun. I gradually found a way to approach people by asking questions about what they did or liked to do most in their lives. I would ask questions about shoes and business to shoe-makers and questions about herbs and midwifery to the midwives. I asked questions about God, the saints, the Church buildings and started attending the sporadic Catholic and the frequent evangelical cults. I asked to attend the meetings that the Community Council had with state institutions and companies. I slowly built a network of contacts and information, which was at the same time a network of streets, alleys, kiosks and houses. I had struggled with travelling to and living within the villages and I later struggled with leaving them behind.

When I came back from Cartagena I thought the most demanding part of my research had been completed. Obviously I was wrong. I will talk more about the difficulties of writing in the concluding section. This text, I am aware, is incomplete, open-ended, and susceptible to further elaboration. Like its preceding fieldwork it constituted a journey. And as with all journeys it is made of chosen and discarded paths, of planned sightseeing and of the blessings of fortuitous encounters.

In the First Chapter I deal with the Island's particular historical and geographical position and with the different projects of place-making which shaped its territory, limiting and, simultaneously, empowering its inhabitants. I deal with and try to bring together different kinds of movement and mobility. The idea that movement, and especially the tension between movement and groundedness, shaped fundamental characteristics of the island's social world and the social relations islanders entertained with other actors cuts across the chapters but it is mainly developed in the first one. I begin by examining various stories concerned with the "origins" of the *Baruleros* and *Ararqueros* and with the islanders' journeys, movements and interactions with other peoples and individuals. I consider the ways in which current issues related with development projects prompted the retrieval and the circulation of memory. I look at the territorial effects of the new articulations of regional, national and transnational power and I reflect on the identity and community making practices involved in the recent re-ethnicization process. I use people's stories and memories and my own fieldwork experience to reflect on the historical and current production of locality and community through and by hegemonic and counterhegemonic practices, discourses and imagination.

The Second chapter addresses local forms of relatedness. I focus on some of the mechanisms through which people created and fostered connections and distance, produced and disseminated ideas of family and "community" as well as ideas about approved and valued, or disruptive and dangerous, forms of sociality. I am particularly

concerned with how masculinities and femininities are signified and performed and with their place and community-making effects. I explore the connections and intersections between discourses about gender, race and generations. In weaving together my observations and people's memories I hope to show that the "disorder", of which villagers often talked, was the result of various, interconnected processes. "Disorder" was the result of an ongoing colonial project of domination and of the repression of black people's social world. At the same time, "disorder" expressed, in the language borrowed from central institutions concerned with "ordering", categorizing and educating (the state, but also the media, imbued with popular "psi" sciences and various religious institutions), perceptions of historical discontinuity, fragmentation and, increasingly, abrupt change, which could not be signified through other counter-hegemonic metanarratives. Finally, perceived "disorder" also stemmed, in some cases, from practices which, more or less consciously, opposed dominant moral views and dominant ideas about adequate models of social relations. Local "disorder" cannot be understood without digging into the history of hegemonic order. Through the intersection between narratives about disorder and those of the long-established, dominant rhetoric about unruliness and regulation it is possible to look at memory, identity and at various facets of local sociality, in a time of rapid social change.

The Third chapter focuses on local Pentecostalism. As is the case in other towns and villages of the Costa, even in Barú, Pentecostal churches outnumber Catholic congregations. Pentecostalism has profoundly affected local religious experience and, broadly speaking, places and place-making practices. It has created divisions and novel perceptions and ideas of "community". Through the presentation of fragments of two testimonies of conversion and through an ethnographic account of my friendship with a Barulero who, during my fieldwork, was getting acquainted with a Pentecostal congregation, I try to reflect on how Pentecostalism seems to re-articulate ideas and discourses about gender, family and identity. Pentecostalism also articulates the local and the global, "tradition" and perceptions of and desires for modernity, reciprocity and hierarchy. It provides metanarratives through which individual lives and local events can be interpreted.

In the Fourth chapter I use Kapferer's idea of "phantasmagorical space" (2002) in order to reflect upon the local experience of magic and of some facets of popular Catholicism. The Island's phantasmagorical space comprises and mingles beings, relationships, journeys, distant places and the island's socioeconomic and physical landscape. Stories and memories about "*brujería*" function as memory-making and interpretive devices, express hegemonic and counterhegemonic gender ideals and concerns about intimacy, ambiguous personhood and social identity. Magical/medical/religious practices convey and reinforce visions and experiences of power, of embodiment, and of place and relatedness.

Finally, in the conclusions I try to bring together some of the issues which concerned me during my fieldwork and while writing this dissertation. I used the image of and the discourses about the "Road" which was being built during my fieldwork and which is supposed to cross the whole Island and connect it to the mainland, and therefore to Cartagena. The road, with its physical and imaginary junctions, functioned as a metaphor for drawing connections between the various issues I explored and for my own, precarious and incomplete journeying to and throughout the Island and back.

ⁱ See “La idea de ‘alboroto’ en castellano. Notas sobre dos vocablos: ‘bululu’ y ‘mitote’.

Cvc.cervantes.es./lengua/thesaurus/pdf/06/TH_06_003_024_0.pdf.

“*Rochela*” stands, in Venezuelan and Colombian spoken language, for “commotion, uproar, and disturbance”. Interestingly, the term seems to have referred, before being applied to human beings, and especially to runaway slaves, to restless, nervous cattle and horses, or those animals which refused to go on moving and working or which, having escaped surveillance, gathered in a more secluded space. Even the term “maroon” (*cimarrón*), as Wolf (1997) noted, originally referred to cattle. Slaves were considered possessions, precious indeed, but possessions, nevertheless, as horses and cows were.

CHAPTER 1. Between grounded-ness and movement: place-history- and community-making in the Island

Un caballo corre con pies de hombre por las calles, se encabrita, no relincha, como quien tiene sed, grita: ¡el Pasado regresa! ¡La fiera ha regresado!

Fenómenos naturales, Uriel Cassiani Pérez, *Ceremonias para criaturas de agua dulce*.

“But the historicity of the human condition also requires that practices of power and domination be renewed. It is that renewal that should concern us most, even if in the name of our pasts. The so-called legacies of past horrors—slavery, colonialism, or the Holocaust—are possible only because of that renewal. And that renewal occurs only in the present. Thus, even in relation to the Past our authenticity resides in the struggles of our present. Only in the present can we be true or false to the past we can choose to acknowledge.”

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past; power and the production of history*.

People’s stories: the “origins”

In the island, some villagers say, the *indios* lived their lives and buried their dead. This happened in a past which memory does not clearly pin down and which, occasionally, intrudes into the present. From the island, people told me, the indigenous ran away, since the men who had arrived from Cartagena—and before that from across the Ocean—had, after pillaging the gold-bejewelled dead, turned their eyes upon the living. Toward the Island, it was said, other persons paddled from all over the Bay, running away from imprisonment in all the shapes it could take, from the colonial fortifications of Bocachica to a landowner’s *estancia*. From the Island these not-yet villagers had sailed to other, still unfenced or unsurveilled social and geographical spaces, and to the Island black, and *mestizo* farmers had come or returned, travelling from the City and from other islands, by river, or on the sea.

Development has unearthed these and other old stories and made them relevant again. It also has, too often, contributed to their mystification and simplification. According to Trouillot (1995: 49): “Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing[...]Thus whatever becomes fact does so with its own inborn absences, specific to its production.” In this sense, the activities and processes which development brought to the Island have, like in a magician’s game, simultaneously exhibited and materialized the past (or following Trouillot’s idea of past as “past-ness”, as a “position”, materialized certain junctions, certain landscapes and features of the past which fitted into current plans) and added other veils of silence to the gaps through which the Island has entered and slipped out of official history-making.

When I spoke with people, these not only looked at the future with hope and fear alike but often re-evoked memories. Ethnographic encounters constitute (and provide) a space and a time for rehearsing, comparing, and co-constructing memories. During my fieldwork, the conversations I had with Baruleros and Ararqueros rarely begun with and from “origins”, but instead presented discursive crossroads which brought us back to imagined, remembered, half-heard, half-fantasized beginnings.

The *Indios*

The stories which many villagers tell about their journeys feature intimate encounters and sustained relationships with the indigenous people of various geographical regions. Despite this, and even though the indigenous element often showed up in hair texture or in the shape of someone's eyes (traits that were explicitly recognized characteristics of *indios*), the *indios* were also the mysterious, radically different protagonists of stories about the past.

In the village of Barú many people knew that theirs had been indigenous land in the past. These disappeared indigenous did not have precise features but possessed an aura of mystery. For some villagers they simply “died of old age”. They left fragments of pottery and figurines, which used to slip out or were forcibly extracted from the land's crevices and that seemed to have an inexplicable value for certain people coming from outside the village. To them they were sold, as always, for what now seems a pittance. And it has been some time now since the last objects were found and given away. During my fieldwork a woman from outside the village sold replicas in her kiosk: clay coloured, pot-bellied figurines which shared their dusty niche with school supplies and sanitary towels. This doesn't mean, I was to learn, that the dead's things weren't “still there”, preserved by the soil and by the vegetation. Before I went away from Barú, Señor Encarna, glancing up with watery eyes from the chair that he rarely left, told me that when I came back he would bring me to the *Playita de los muertos* (the dead's beach), where the *indios* left memories of their passage inside the earth.

Any person, new to the village, who wanted to know something about its past—or any child told at school to write about Barú's traditions—inevitably landed on Señor Nestor's porch. Ninety-three- years-old Nestor Cortés had been many things at once in his life: a farmer, a rum-seller, a musician, a husband, a father. He sat by the door of his house and kept vigil over village life or read the newspapers that people, knowing that he was interested in what was going on in the world, used to bring him from Cartagena. According to him all the *indios* who had lived in the island had been instructed by their *cacique* to run away from their land. Then, the Spaniards had brought blacks from Africa, while other blacks had been “here already”ⁱⁱ. Once, he added—lowering his voice and leaning forwards as if he wanted to make sure I would understand the importance of what he was about to reveal— “it was said” (*decían*) that black people had been brought here so that they could “earn a living” (*ganarse la vida*) but that wasn't true. They had been brought on this land because they were meant to be sold!

With time, according to Señor Nestor, some creole (*criollo*) families had come from Cartagena, the first being the Medrano, the most ancient among Barú's families. It is tempting to relate his words to the historical documents recording the deportation of thousands of indigenous people from the Barú, Tierrabomba and San Bernardo Islands to La Española (Dominican Republic/Haiti). In 1501 Rodrigo de Bastidas was given permission by the queen of Spain to replenish with this new labour force the swiftly depleted plantations of La Española after affirming that the *indios*, there, were “*caníbales*” who had resisted Christianisation and refused to submit to royal power (see Vidal Ortega, 2002). The territory of the island was then the scenario of one of the first experiments in trans-regional and global connectedness that modern colonialism undertook in the Americas. Amerindian slaves would soon be substituted by Africans. When considering these events massive flights, as those suggested by Señor Nestor's story, do not seem surprising. What intrigued me is the fact that memories of faraway events have been preserved, in certain forms, usually lacking details and a precise temporal localization, but abounding in recurrent themes, in ideas that craft memory-scapes which link and reconstitute past and current concerns.

The ancient technique of the “*divide et impera*” was widely implemented in the *Tierra Firme*, as in other Spanish colonies, and obtained good results from the beginning. It seems that some *caciques*, like Dahoa, were subdued by others, who had allied themselves with the Spaniards or had been forced to do so. Carex, *cacique* of current Tierrabomba (Codex-Codego) was “convinced” to collaborate with the Spaniards, according to their chronicles, by the mysterious *mohán* (shaman, medicine-man) Carón. Carex is said to have later entertained such a *collaborative* relationship with the colonial authorities that he even kept for them the gold that other *caciques*, like the above-mentioned Dahoa, had been obliged to collect (Herrera Angel, 1993; Bossa Herazo, 1969). The story of how Carón’s sorcery facilitated Spanish conquest resonated with widespread ideas about the indigenous as sorcerers and devilish creatures. Señor Roberto, a Barulero who had founded its own evangelical community, used to tell me that all the problems—poverty, drugs, violence—that the island was experiencing had an ancient origin: the deal that local indigenous, and primarily their *caciques*, had stricken with the Devil.

Another story, contradicting Señor Nestor’s version, claimed that island’s *cacique* had never agreed to sell his people’s land but that upon his death, his wife had sold it to the first creole families coming from Cartagena. This version fascinated me from the start as it possesses striking, and not casual, I think, similarities with another, prominent and peculiar, narrative about beginnings, belonging and foundational losses, to which I will soon refer, that of of Polonia, the *estancia* which is Araqueros’ mythicalⁱⁱⁱ place of origin.

“Taking refuge”

“Here there always have been people from everywhere. And because of the castles of San Felipe, of San Jose, of San Fernando there have been Africans here. But in that conquest many people ran away. This is how Palenque and Marialabaja were born. And they brought women to those villages. And they seeded a race (*enrazaron*). That was the reason why people got a race.” (Señor Julio, Barú)

“When the violence came, in 1914(sic), those who survived ran here. But this wasn’t today’s natives’ land, no.... it was once owned by the *indios*. So the Spanish had the *indios* out of here. Then we people started coming, running away, and taking refuge here, then they got the Spanish out of here. And the Spanish nowadays are trying to get the land back but they cannot, not anymore. Why? Because the natives already have Barú’s deeds. Do you understand? Then people started settling (*radicarse*) here and having native village children. Then the family started to grow.”(Señor Raúl, Barú)

Señor Julio had travelled for a conspicuous part of his life, to Colón and other Caribbean islands. Señor Raúl had always been a farmer, a fisherman and a *celador* (watchman) and when he turned into a person who “helped” the others, through herbs, *oraciones* (literally: “prayers”, but, also, incantations, charms) and other *trabajos* (magical works), he got to travel as well, although not so far away, in order to exchange knowledge with other magic experts and to attend to those who needed him. Both their fathers had come from other black villages of the department of Sucre, which have traditionally been connected with Cartagena and its rural areas by commercial and kinship networks. Both wove into the story of their lives and their family that of the origins of the island and of its inhabitants.

Señor Raúl conflated different historical moments, distinct bursts of violence, into a single theme. His family’s story— running away from a village, pushed by yet another episode of the violence, dispossession and coercion that black *costeño* peasants have had to face from colonial to current times on—made collective experiences which did not appear into most history books (and whose records do not feature characteristics, like chronological precision, linearity or the clear causal chains-usually associated with

trustworthy accounts) retrievable, and thinkable. At the same time this conflation turned personal experience and the memory passed down through tales of lived life into a people's experience and into the history of a place. Through stories like his, past and present got intertwined in a sort of symbolic and iconic "montage" (Mitchell in Taussig, 1987) which linked images and emotions into themes and "structures of feelings" (Williams, 1977).

If we compare historical records and memory, it is likely that the people on the move of Señor Raúl's and other individuals' stories, had already envisioned Barú as a related territory and Baruleros as people with whom interactions already existed. Villagers sometimes substituted the word "*rescatarse*" with the synonym "*resguardarse*" when mentioning the individuals and groups of people who—once upon a time and, for different reasons, nowadays—look(ed) for refuge and protection in the island. For some time I was captivated by the assonance between the colonial socio-spatial category of *resguardo* and Baruleros' *resguardarse*. It immediately suggested a curious interplay between the hegemonic project of control and exploitation of the indigenous and their territory and the strategies of localization (Escobar, 2008) of the people who came to occupy the geographical and social interstices of colonial topography.

There are some elements in people's narratives and in historical records suggesting that parts of the island throughout history escaped colonial control and maintained some autonomy. The famous geographer and explorer Von Humboldt, who sailed along the coast of the island in the eighteenth century, recounts in his diaries that, as he approached the island, he came across two armed black men, wearing metal chains in the guise of ornaments and displaying a mix of audaciousness and irony which outraged even the "French blacks" who were travelling with the white men^{iv}. Ruiz Rivera (2007) mentions a smuggling case in which a Portuguese merchant, who had arrived from Seville without authorization or dispatch papers, had later left part of his human shipload in the island of Barú, before entering the Bay. According to the document the slaves left in the island had died but it is possible that in this or similar circumstances some may have survived and settled in certain areas of the island, which, together with Tierrabomba, was a renowned smugglers' retreat (Latimer, 2009; Ruiz Rivera, 2007). In colonial times, *estancieros* (land-owners)—the most famous case is that of Jorge Gramaxo, an extremely influential Portuguese born *cartagenero*, who owned property in Tierrabomba and benefitted from smuggling and from a transnational network of kin—were often powerful individuals occupying official posts in the City who imported slaves and other goods through their strategically located *estancias*, thus avoiding the payment of taxes to the Crown.

The issue is here that not only did smugglers, seamen and other individuals used the island as a space of production, manoeuvre and deposit but the rural areas of the Bay, the vast province, still thick with *monte* and dotted with semi-autonomous settlements, called by the authorities "*sitios*" or "*rochelas*"^v, constituted a porous space, a trans-territory (Haesbart, 2011) of connecting practices and interrelations. Black peoples, immediately after the conquest, had substituted indigenous paddle-men on the river Magdalena. Free black people owned *estancias* and urban property (Wheat, 2009). The authorities, already in seventeenth century Cartagena, were preoccupied by the continuous flows of black individuals, enslaved and free, between the city and the countryside (*ibid*). Black women often migrated from the rural res to the City and black men migrated or were forcibly relocated from urban regions to rural areas (Helg, 2011). The seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial *hacienda* was a roughly delimited socioeconomic territory within which various categories of colonial subjects lived and worked side by side (Meisel Rocca, 1979).

It is also probable that De la Torre y Miranda's concentration and resettlement campaigns (1774-1779) failed to gather all the *arrochelados* in newly founded Santa Ana. Villagers, neither in Ararca nor in Barú, ever spoke about *palenques* (maroon settlements). For them, as for the vast majority of popular class black *costeños*, Palenque is a singular, well known place which coincides with the village of Palenque de San Basilio. Furthermore *Palenqueros* have been represented until a recent past as coarse, uncivilized and potentially dangerous people and some islanders' accounts still reflect these ideas. Yet people's lives and stories, especially those told by the elderly, in Barú, still preserve echoes of autonomy and rebelliousness, although they aren't usually phrased in terms of outright subversion of hegemonic rules. Señor Raúl also conflated the powerful of the past and those of current times into a single category (*los Españoles*) and mentioned the "deeds" (*escritura*) that through another strategic form of connection ("reaching out towards" and making use of the national legal framework right after the abolition of slavery) had ensured for some time Baruleros' relative territorial independence. In 1851^{vi}, the year in which slavery was officially abolished in Colombia, fifteen villagers bought the land on which the village stood on behalf of the whole community. In drawing the deeds they specified that it was their will and intention that all the land be considered village land and be kept "*pro indiviso*" (in common). These deeds exist and are held in the historical archive in Cartagena.

Before the deeds were rediscovered elderly villages had talked about them and had passed on to the younger the story that those who came before had secured the land, and thus the autonomy, or so they thought, and freedom of its people through their collective agreement and purchase. The surnames of the oldest village families are in the document, although the identities and the lives of those who signed it have been forgotten or become a blend of historically documented and fantasized individuals. In Señor Raúl's words—and he was one of those who knew about the deeds and about many other things concerning the past which inevitably influenced the present—Barú as a territory and Barú as a "community" and a "family" overlapped. As in other Caribbean contexts (Wilson, 1973; Besson, 2002), all native islanders felt entitled to the use of the land. I heard various times people saying that they were allowed to build a house or occupy a plot of land only after they had children who were born in the village. Belonging, even during my fieldwork, meant being raised or raise children on the same land. It especially meant having intimate relationships with other native villagers, fostering long-term interactions with them.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century *rochelas* (and, in part, their subsequent nineteenth century transformation into settlements, *caseríos*, and villages) were social and geographic interstitial spaces. They were spaces of diversity and common marginality. They were "rooted networks" (Rochelau in Haesbart, 2011) which wove together retreat and outward interaction, which crafted bridges across physical spaces, between the city and the countryside, across various categories of peripheral and colonized individuals.

The *rochela*, more than the *palenque*, I think, and I will say more about this, may turn into a symbol and into a model for current political struggles and for efficacious and powerful strategies of self-representation. Some of its historical features still permeated Barú's social life.

"Enrazar"

In Señor Julio's account Palenque (and, to a lesser extent Marialabaja) figure as the strongholds of black regional ethnicity. His "origins" story was a fascinating amalgam of the visions disseminated through time by national/regional institutions and alternative traditions.

According to Señor Julio, black prisoners running away from the island of Bocachica, whose fortifications were built by black slaves with lime dug out from the island's hills and melted in the gigantic ovens of the island's *estancias*, escaped their captivity and reached Barugrande (an area near the village of Barú) by boat. From there they moved towards Santa Ana and then towards Ararca, the northernmost tip of the island. These stories reverted the official version of colonial and national conquest of the island's territory, which started from Santa Ana and advanced towards the southern area, around the *Ciénaga de Barú*, on which a group of people, among those who had been forcibly resettled in Santa Ana by de la Torre y Miranda, asked the permission to settle in 1778, complaining about the greediness^{vii} of a certain cleric. Stories also reversed the trajectory of development projects and the infrastructure they are associated with, which have entered the island from Ararca and are slowly proceeding towards Barú.

From Señor Julio's story it can be gleaned that the protracted combination of strategic interaction and outward movement, openness and relative closure, gave islanders a measure of autonomy vis-a-vis colonial and state institutions. His story also points towards another essential factor: the cultural unity of the rural region which developed around Cartagena and across which black farmers, fishermen, traders and seamen have travelled and interacted from the beginning of the Colony. Señor Julio's story moved from Bocachica, Palenque, Marialabaja and his own village. Without explicitly voicing continuity he traced networks and suggested some kind of historical communality. Moreover he used "race" as the colonial authorities used "*casta*" in the past and in the way that current top-down political multi-culturalism, uses ethnicity: by setting apart certain groups of people are the different ones and leaving the white and European as the "unmarked category" (Wade, 2009). His narrative is a remainder of the historical entanglement of the category of sex and race in the Americas (Wade, 2008) and of the complex relationships between indigenous and black people in the Caribbean, which featured cooperation and intermingling but also coercion and violence (Helg, 2011; Palacios de la Vega[and Reichel-Dolmatoff], 1955; Rodriguez-Bobb, 2002).

In Barú, as in other villages of the Bay, it isn't difficult to hear the expression "*enrazar*". *Enrazar* combined sexual reproduction and racial categorizations. "Race" within these understandings, is acquired through sexual reproduction, through intimate intermingling of blacks and non-blacks and was thought to mark individual bodies with certain phenotypic signs, like the kinky hair or particular kinds of mouth and nose shapes. Despite people's limited proclivity towards ethnic self-identification—a trend which has started to change in the last decades and which reflects the peculiar and simultaneous ubiquity and erasure of race in nearby Cartagena—almost all the Bay's inhabitants are, in the discourses and descriptions of European or North-American visitors, of Colombians coming from the Andean region, or in those of white and middle class *cartageneros*, racially marked. This overlapping of a "race" with spatial territory has influenced the interactions islanders fostered with other social groups and individuals. The *raza*, furthermore, was acquired through practices ("bringing women") which blur the borders between voluntary relationships and violence. Several historical documents have left clues about the gender dynamics of the not always peaceful interactions between black and indigenous peoples in the Province of Cartagena. As in the legend of the Mexican Malinche (which has its Caribbean Colombian equivalent, that of the India Catalina), silences, gaps, euphemisms, some linguistic expressions and, above all, certain narrative themes and turns let us catch a glimpse of the various levels at which the "creative destruction" (Harvey's [2014] expression) of colonial social life operated.

Groundedness and movement

The island of Barú was shaped as a significant place by various sets of historical practices characterized by a strategic interplay of rootedness and relative isolation, self-reliance and interaction. The tension between standing “apart” and “being part of” —in distinct historical epochs, a regional, a national or a global space—has been differently signified and exploited by its inhabitants and other key external actors. These two dialectic poles, relative isolation and being part of a “rooted network” (Rochelau in Haesbart, 2011) of movements and contacts, have provided islanders, and especially Baruleros, with the discursive and symbolic means to reflect on their identity and to make sense of their historical experiences.

Being “apart” gave islanders, and especially Baruleros, for whom relative isolation also meant openness, reaching out towards other lands, some independence and the possibility to escape the surveillance and the limits of the City. Being “apart” didn’t exclusively mean fewer contacts: it above all meant the chance to engage in significant interactions while retaining some measure of autonomy. Limited availability of transportation, dependence from the sea, the winds and other atmospheric conditions, and reliance on the *caños*, the marshes and the *monte*, shaped the island’s social world and endowed its inhabitants with valuable knowledge and specific ways of understanding the world and history. At the same time and especially for certain groups of people and in certain historical periods, it also produced feelings of abandonment and the sensation of having been left out, neglected by national institutions, regional authorities and by progress and modernity.

The island has been simultaneously part of Cartagena, being as it is one of its rural *corregimientos*, and distinct from it. It faces the Bay of Cartagena and it extends beyond it. It has been part of the Caribbean—its relations with current Panama, with other Caribbean islands and with neighbouring Venezuela were once more frequent than those maintained with other Colombian regions—but these impulses have ultimately been limited and conditioned by its official belonging to the nation. The Island was (and is, again, as a bridge has been built in 2014) part of the mainland but its strategic position within colonial games and geographies has caused its separation from the continent. The island has bridged the distance between different spaces and social groups and, with its rich “phantasmagorical space” (Kapferer, 2002), between the human and the mythological world. Islanders’ values and worldviews have been shaped and preserved by their “grounded-ness”^{viii} within their territory. The historical dialectics between grounded-ness and movement has fostered a particular kind of “place-based consciousness” (Dirlik, 1999), an “ecology of collective representations” (Wolf, 1997, p.390) which condense and weave together different experiences of life “at the margins”, in the interstices of national and regional societies.

Now new social processes are re-articulating the interactions between Cartagena’s peripheral territories and regional, national and (trans-) national spaces. The media, migration along novel routes, new generations’ increased participation in educational and military institutions, religious proselytizing and development projects are creating new sets of possibilities for spatial and cultural connection and disjunction.

Barú and the research on place-making

The island has often been depicted as a pristine natural paradise, as the remote, exotic space around the corner, an unspoiled oasis of turquoise waters and coconut palms just outside the city and thus, for its special geographical position, a space that could be “filled”, “developed” and made productive through the application of specific kinds of

knowledge and intervention. These representations became more frequent as the island gradually turned into the principal target of touristic development projects and the complexity of its inhabitants' lives and values was increasingly simplified, dismissed or erased by the superficial representations which commoditized the island and turned it into a dwelling place for potential wealthy sojourners. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of these processes of strategic simplification, an ethnography of Barú can give a substantial contribution to the anthropological research on place-making.

Places are global and local at the same time, but global and local features mark and shape them according to different configurations. Doreen Massey's (1994) work, as that of other cultural geographers, revealed that places are built out of significant social and historical relations. Gupta and Ferguson's (1992) work has circulated widely the concept of place-making. Both authors prompted social researchers to reflect on the practices, relations and phenomena through which space is made into a specific place, culture and identity are "territorialized" and "community" and difference are simultaneously created by inhabiting the a territory that always bears the sedimented marks of history and of translocal social interactions.

Rogelio Haesbart's (2011) contribution to place-making research is particularly interesting for me. He proposes the concept of "multi-territoriality", which has the advantage of conveying the place-making effects of interactions and movement across localities and the idea of a permeable, porous "territory" which can strategically thicken into "relative territorial closure" or, when required by the circumstances, support and foster purposeful "trans-territorial connections". Likewise, scholars and writers who have dealt with hybridity and social liminality, from various perspectives, like Bhabha (1994), or Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), have contributed to the deconstruction of monolithic, rigid, and a-historical concepts of place, unveiling the relational, performative and multivocal character of localities, communities and identities.

Studies about "coloniality", modernity and de-colonization (Mignolo, 2002; 2011; Quijano, 2000) have sought to reflect on the historical production of centres and peripheries and on the erasure or marginalization of local forms of knowledge in post-colonial/neo-colonial contexts. Other authors invite us to be more cautious. Various forces traverse and reproduce localities. Some tend to homogenise and construct uniform subjectivities, while others manipulate local dynamics in their favour. Instead of aiming to reconstruct allegedly pristine and tradition-based localities and values, places should work as sites of "invention" (Dirlik, 1997), of construction of relationships and of collaborations between different struggling subjects.

I hope to be able to contribute to these dialogues and, additionally, to be able to show the tensions and conflicts underpinning and accompanying distinct ideas and projects of place/territory. Ideas and representations of places are also ideas and representations of "us" and of "others", of "community" and "alterity", of identity and difference. Thinking about places through movement and interactions—thinking about the island of Barú through its inhabitants' movements, their historical interactions with, for example, the city, the Caribbean space, the nation, urban or rural elites, with the indigenous, the black peasants from "*la otra costa*"—is crucial for de- and re-constructing identity as a processual and dialogic notion, an endeavour which would greatly benefit, I feel, Baruleros and Ararqueros, and that could prove indispensable to cope with the quagmires of politically charged identity in times of re-ethnicization.

Travelling, sailing, "walking"



Barú : within and beyond the Bay

The island has been port, haven and shelter. Relative isolation, especially in the case of Barú, made certain kinds of activities and interactions possible and advantageous. Goods have come and gone from the Island's natural ports and coves. People had earned their living by reaching out and bringing back. Movements of goods and people, spontaneous and organized, unofficial and semisecret, but frequent and familiar, shaped by and strengthening kinship ties and relevant relationships, had made the village a special place.

Baruleros are still known in Cartagena and in the region as expert sailors and travellers. They established *fincas* in nearby territories, like the islands of Rosario, first using them as provisional dwellings during fishing expeditions (*ranchar*) and then turning portions of them into coconut *fincas*. The inhabitants of the island of San Bernardo are descendants of Baruleros who left the island in the past and those islands' old surnames still partially overlap with those of Barú's traditional families. Similarly, Isla Fuerte's inhabitants claim to be the descendants of people who left the island of Barú two hundred years ago and Puerto Escondido villagers remember that their village was founded by two brothers who had left Barú, bringing along their *fandangos* (a genre of folk music), for which Puerto Escondido is currently known in the Costa (El Tiempo, 14-03-1996). In Barú, men who were at least in their fifties had often lived the experience of travelling as seamen or were raised in a context in which travelling and sailing were an essential part of masculine identity and experience.

Smuggling

Alfonso Múnera (2005; 2008) showed that smuggling constituted Cartagena's most important economic activity since colonial times and well into the nineteenth century. An extensive network of unofficial, un-authorized commerce, that supplied

Cartagena through the centuries of colonial power (when the official trade between the Iberian peninsula and the colonies was scarce and couldn't satisfy a growing city's needs) linked Cartagena and its rural *corregimientos* with Santa Marta, Riohacha, Colón, Coro, Cumaná and other ports of nowadays Venezuela, Cuba, Jamaica, Curaçao and other places (See Vidal Ortega, 2002). Smuggling constituted the basis of local elites' wealth. Smuggling turned Cartagena into a flourishing city. It is the origin of the architectural beauties tourists flock to admire. Concerns about smuggling influenced its politics and shaped people's daily lives. Governors like Daza Guzmán or José de Zuñiga personally supervised smuggling, importing goods and slaves (often, as in the latter's case, through Barú or other rural areas of the Bay), and developed contacts with English and French smugglers, who were thus able to acquire a precise knowledge of the Bay's topography. This would cost the city some of its most tragic moments during Dessalignes' and Drake's attacks (Grahn, 1993; Ruiz Rivera, 2007).

According to Múnera, smuggling constituted a “way of life” and a “set of values” for the elites and the influential families who managed smuggling and for the popular classes who participated in and benefitted from it. Moral, spatial and social transgression shaped Cartagena and gave it a special character. Múnera's reflections echo those of 17th century Bishop Monsalvo and other religious authorities of the time—reported by Vidal Ortega (2002)—who described the entire city as an “island”, an “*isla de los apostatas*”, a place where respectability and propriety were officially acknowledged but where even official authorities indulged in every kind of sexual, commercial and spatial boundary-crossing.

In the XIX century, Cartagena's authorities tried to hinder the smuggling which passed through or had its base in Santa Ana and Barú by setting up customs control posts in the island (Laurent, 2008). The 1860s were in fact the years of the smuggling bonanza associated with the rubber-boom of the Darién. A series of reports, written by the governor of the Department of Bolívar for the national authorities of Bogotá, described Barú, Pasacaballos and Bocachica (in contrast with Santa Ana, described as affected by “intellectual backwardness” [*retraso intelectual*]) as relatively prosperous villages of hardworking and expert sailors, whose only competitors on the route to the Darién and along the Magdalena were a few boats coming from Cartagena and from the Sinú area (Solano, 2007).

The 1869 report also mentioned the problems that smuggling was causing in and outside the villages: a diffused “desire for profit”, indigenous flights in the Darién/Urabá, and the difficulties of administrating territories where most men had left to travel and women were left on their own. Almost ten years later, in 1877—the bonanza reduced to a trickle—things had changed. Barú, together with other black villages, seemed to “constantly get worse” to the point that the departmental authorities couldn't foresee for the wretched villages and their inhabitants “the remotest hope of betterment”. During my fieldwork memories of the rubber bonanza were conflated with those of the other cycles of smuggling, especially with those of Barú's golden era of commerce with Colón in the 1930/40s, which had been personally experienced by some villagers or by their parents. I couldn't make sense of some of the stories I heard about famous Baruleros of the past, though, until I found recorded evidence of the 19th century rubber trade, which brought villagers in contact with the indigenous people of the Urabá. Again, memory, arranged along certain themes and structures of feeling, simultaneously hid and preserved historical events and processes.

Smuggling turned Barú into “Little Colón”. It brought commodities from foreign countries to the village. It brought people from the city who wanted to buy those objects. Señora Liduvina remembered those times with nostalgia.

“...they said Barú was *Colón chiquito*... they were traveling with smuggling (*viajaba el contrabando*). There were beautiful things...every kind of things, everything they’d bring to this village, every type of crockery, tobacco, cigarettes...imagine that there was a man here that even had a die to make money, people had luxury here (*tuvieron el lujo*)...that man...there was a granary there, there was every kind of goods inside, like the things sold in Cartagena. It was the first big thing that existed here. He had a shop and jewels, jewels and clothes, he owned it all.”

A *cartagenero* friend of mine, born in the seventies, told me how common it was, when he was a child, to hear that a particular load of, for instance, electric appliances, had arrived to Barú and how people would flock to the village to get hold of the merchandise. Some local men were boat owners. They were able to control smuggling routes (Durán, 2007). Other individuals worked for them. The villagers who cultivated the land could ask a boat owner to take their produce and sell it along the network of stopovers that boats followed on their way back Colón. Other people worked as seamen or cooks for boats owned by affluent *Cartageneros* or worked in the Guajira, where, as another traveller, Señor Enrique, told me once: from Puerto López onwards, it was “just smuggling” (*puro contrabando*) and indigenous territory (*puro indio*). Both were usually associated in seamen’s tales. Both represented dangers, lures and opportunities.

Smuggling made some people affluent and prestigious and made villagers proud of being Baruleros. Of certain smugglers it was said that they “*knew*” about magic and that their magic had helped them while travelling, while someone else’s envy and greater power had sunken down other men’s boats and dreams, destroyed possessions and families and created divisions.

Smuggling and “traveling” provided opportunities for negotiating and reflecting on villagers’ identity and for meaningful interactions. Señor Encarna, one of my neighbours, spent many years of his life on a boat which transported goods from Cartagena to Colón and back. Boats often had stopovers in San Blas islands, where the crew got to trade and interact in other ways with the *kuna* people who inhabited them. Señor Encarna could recall several tales about the *kuna*, had a basic knowledge of their language and, like other elderly travellers, spoke with a mix of bitterness and nostalgia about *kuna* women, whom, in these travellers’ words were usually represented as enchanting but inaccessible. A relationship with them, if discovered, could cost a man his life or a conspicuous fine. I feel now that these memories, the desires, fantasies and the socially and psychological dynamics those interactions fostered, have contributed to shape islanders’ ideas and stories of *brujería* and of magical encounters, stories in which beautiful indigenous women, susceptible, this time, to be “caught” and seduced. play a great role. Curiously, Señor Encarna reversed the stereotype of the indigenous as a sorcerer and was said to made some money by tricking the *indios*—who as in some of Taussig’s (1987) works, associated magic and sorcery with neighbouring black populations—into believing that he was a *brujo*.

Señor Julio travelled for many years. He had visited various Caribbean islands and he especially remembered the port-city of Colón. He would tell stories about its *cabarets* (brothels), which he sometimes compared with Colombian ones. While in the latter men engaged in mere commercial transactions, he thought that in Colón men, although they could choose between women of every colour, age and provenience, still had to prove their male skills by seducing the prospective partners. Colón was usually remembered as a place bursting with opportunities and lures, with people from all over the world, foreign drinks, exotic goods, and with dangers—the dark alleys of the harbour, thefts, violence—that expert travellers could face by displaying what was perhaps the most important

among male travellers' skills: the capacity of "walking" without "having problems" (*tener problemas*) and "making enemies" (*tener enemigos*).

Colón was inextricably linked to Cartagena, despite (and because of) its distance. It was Cartagena's mirror city on the other side of the isthmus. What Cartagena promised, with its transgressions and its possibilities for engaging in particular sets of connecting and disconnecting practices, Colón granted. Through Colón came the salsa music which was recorded in New York and Puerto Rico as well as goods coming from as far as China. Señor Julio, like other villagers, had maintained for a long time the habits he had acquired when travelling: listening to his records, drinking his whisky, using Chinese soap. He had started travelling when he was young and his life on the sea connected different places and people of the Caribbean. After fishing together with *margariteño* fishermen with Antillean (Aruba) connections, he had visited the Guajira, where his brother lived, Venezuela and then started with the Panamanian route. He decided to stop when drugs started to be transported together with and hidden within the usual smuggled goods. During his sailor's years, as many other fellow villagers, he gathered and brought back stories, goods, practices, understandings and images that shaped Barú into a particular place and whose memories still influenced the way Baruleros perceived current and future promises and risks.

Barú's prosperity also brought new people to the village. Señor Encarna smiled when he recalled the *cabarets* that some Baruleros had set up with men from San Andrés. Although they were really meant for the *gringos*, whose huge "floating houses" used to come by the *Playita de los Muertos*, local men, like Encarna himself, came to have more durable relationships with the beautiful women, coming from different parts of the country (predominantly white in most tales and often Caleñas, women from Cali, who in Colombia are considered the epitome of national beauty), who worked in those bars. Stories exist about the Turks (Turcos, said of any person of Middle Eastern origins) and the Chinese who opened up shops in the village. They are tales about these people's eccentric food tastes and their different ways of interacting with other villages and often made narrators spend some words about their own identity, associating it with distinct ways of doing things or of being. Most people went away, other stayed. They became "family".

"Walking" and Migration

My neighbour Pilar, in Ararca, used to complain about her older son, an eleven years old boy. The boy didn't like school and instead of spending his time there, he often said he would have preferred "walking" (*caminar*). His adoptive father, Pilar's partner, a much older man, had *walked* for years, as most adult male villagers. Some, especially in Barú, had travelled to Maicao, in the Guajira, a smuggling heaven for several decades, and used to bring back goods that could be sold in Cartagena and in the villages. Others had gone to different places. For most walking meant adventure, freedom, chance to learn from life, an occasion to come back and acquiring a new status as an experienced individual. Villagers walked in the past and did it during my fieldwork, although with less frequency. Their routes had also drastically changed.

Some of the people who couldn't travel by sea or did not want to, as Señor Enrique, often got to walk. Señor Enrique walked until the "end of Colombia" (*final de Colombia*) and into Venezuela. He walked with the *indios*, that he met in the Guajira and that he learnt to fear and to treat appropriately. He never had problems, he remarked, as he knew that with the *indios*, who, he thought, had "some devil parts" (*partes del Diablo*), one had to be *pendejo* (to appear extremely naïve) in order to get along and survive.

El Viejo, an elderly Ararquero, had “walked all the villages”, in the Colombian coast and in Venezuela, “never made an enemy” and had brought back the feeling that his native Ararca was the worst village of the inhabited world, as people were envious of each other, there, and some had repeatedly tried to kill him with sorcery. During his walking through Venezuela he had been aided by his friend Roberto’s magical knowledge, which had been particularly useful to appease angry Venezuelan policemen. Magic was often associated with travel and movement in the island and in Cartagena alike. People who travelled a lot were said to be in need of special protection and men who travelled easily (*ligero*), despite owning little money, or those who faced difficult adventures and came back unharmed or even wealthier, could be suspected of being *zánganos* (sorcerers, see the chapter on *brujería*).

Cartagena was the islanders’ main reference point. It was connected to their lives, their families, their memories in several ways. Cartagena was the place where support and help could be found when villagers needed to look for work, when they wanted to continue their studies or when they needed special health-care. It was also the place from which people nowadays started travelling towards other places, where the administrative authorities resided and where information and goods could be gathered and brought back to the island.

Barranquilla has for some time represented the coastal industrial modernity. Its factories, its university, its streets represented opportunities, possibilities, for thousands of *costeño* villagers. It has often constituted the first step towards Venezuela. Although its importance has somewhat waned during the last years it was still common to hear of people who travelled to the city to work in *casa de familia* (private houses) or in order to look for a job.

Many villagers used to work for some periods in the neighbouring department of Valledupar and especially in the area of Codazzi, during cotton’s harvest, and in Galerazambas, which is now part of the department of Atlántico. These experiences of seasonal migration have allowed villages to earn (little) extra money and have left memories of wild, wondrous, or dangerous places, of harsh atmospheric conditions, of hard-work, of magic and sorcery, of ambiguous relationships with mysterious *patrones* and with threatening co-workers. These experiences of labour also shaped islanders’ ideas about work, power, and exploitation and provided discursive tools used to make sense of their identity and to define otherness.

Venezuela has been for a long time and especially during the era of the rich, oil-filled, “Saudi” Venezuela (1960s/1970s), the elective destination of *costeño* migration. In the island, in Cartagena’s *barrios*, in the other villages of the Bay, it was difficult not to find a family which hadn’t a relative in the neighbouring country or whose members hadn’t travelled there. During my fieldwork some kept memories, others objects and documents. There were those who had left behind a house, a sibling or a former partner and those who through migration had built their houses in Colombia and sent their children to school. Migration to Venezuela had dramatically decreased, especially due to the constant devaluation of Venezuelan currency through the last decades but some people still travelled there, as extensive kin networks still offer support in Caracas and in other cities to those who want to look for a job there and because it was said that those who went to Venezuela had at least ensured their daily “*tres comidas*” (three meals). People also believed that finding a job in the neighbouring country was easier than in Cartagena, because Venezuelans were usually thought to be “*flojos*” (lazybones) and in former migrants’ tales hard-working Colombians usually endeared themselves to Venezuelans *patrones* of European origins. Caracas was remembered as huge city which gave people opportunities, freedom, and, especially in the case of women who worked as

house-maids for wealthy families, certain aesthetic tastes and access to particular goods. The reputation the country had for magic and sorcery provided opportunities to learn about magic but also featured in narratives, especially those recounted by evangelicals, about threatening sorcery and evil spirits. The indigenous Wayúu that migrants met while plodding along the clandestine “*trochas*” (paths), became “Venezuelan Indians”: such a fierce and threatening race that it was said, half, but only half-jokingly, that they were capable of eating Colombians once these stepped on the other side of the “*Raya*” (line, the frontier). The loneliness and the injustice experienced in the *materas* (ranches)^{ix} in which man migrants spent months or years working, police harassment of undocumented migrants and the sexual abuse of Colombian women made people reflect on violence, power, discrimination, value their endurance and their skills, and prompted them to think of themselves as “Colombians”.

Young people had recently started to travel to the capital to study and look for work. Bogotá, a “white”, Andean city, with which the young came in contact more and more through television programs, represented for some youngsters an opportunity to study and/or to look for job or for other valuable experiences. The city’s cold climate, its inhabitants’ ways of life or peculiarities (Bogotanos, who, together with other individuals coming from the Andean regions are called “*cachacos*”, are often described as “cold” people who prefer, if possible, locking themselves up in their apartments), and the exploitation and racism that young and black *costeños* had to face in the capital featured prominently in their stories of migration. But so did the lights, hopes and possibilities of the life-bursting City.

Walking, travelling and gender

Walking had specific gender dimensions. Boys dreamt of walking and men boasted about their past walking, the abilities and skills it entailed or provided, the adventurous situations it offered, the women they met and had affairs with. Female migration and travelling weren’t emphasized in the same way. Memories of female migration revealed the existence of ideas about the risks of women’s traveling. Women who walked could be rumoured to be *brujas* (witches): unrestrained movement, autonomy and the selfishness and treachery that female walking is sometimes supposed to entail also figured in local stories about flying *brujas* (as we will see in another chapter). Memories of female travelling also constantly revealed that there was a huge gap between the conservative ideology of female appropriate rootedness and women’s actual experiences. Such a gap requires reflections about the strategies through which certain life accounts are magnified and circulated and other silenced or dismissed.

Women did walk. And they had done even more so in the past. Señora Esperanza’s mother, “Flora” was the founder of El Pozón, one of Cartagena’s biggest popular neighbourhoods, a place she had cleared (*limpiar*) and cultivated on her own. Emilia had lived between the city and the village all her life. Ever since, as a five year old girl that her mother had entrusted to a godmother, when she had cleared the neighbourhood on which one of the city’s biggest shopping malls now stands, right up to her current daily work as a maid in the wealthy neighbourhood of Bocagrande, she had been on the move. Señora Paulina, her mother, had spent years in Cartagena, working for city families. Other women, like Señora Liduvina, had migrated to Venezuela and could recall saucy tales, evoke the landscapes, fashions and preoccupations of distant times, and reflect on interactions which highlighted issues of power relations between black and non-blacks, wealthy and disadvantaged individuals and contrasting representations of femininity and “colombian-ness”. As with other islanders, she had also travelled to San Andrés, from which her father had come with other fishermen decades before, with his

English Bible and his strange way of speaking. Her memories, which she wove into a narration blending hilariousness, melodrama and nostalgia, gave me an intense feeling of the possibilities for subversion and resistance that female movement had represented.



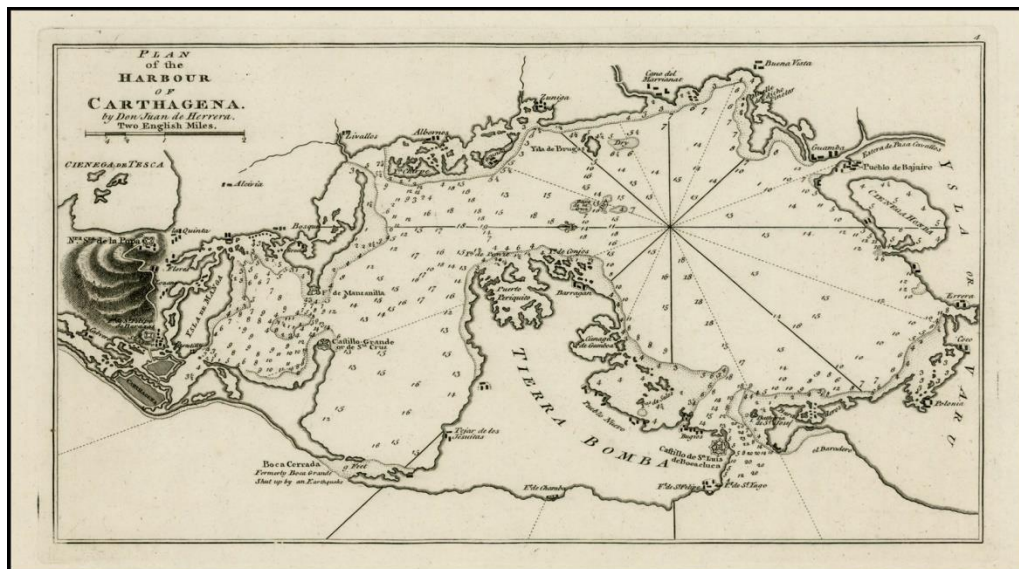
Colombia-Atlantic Coast



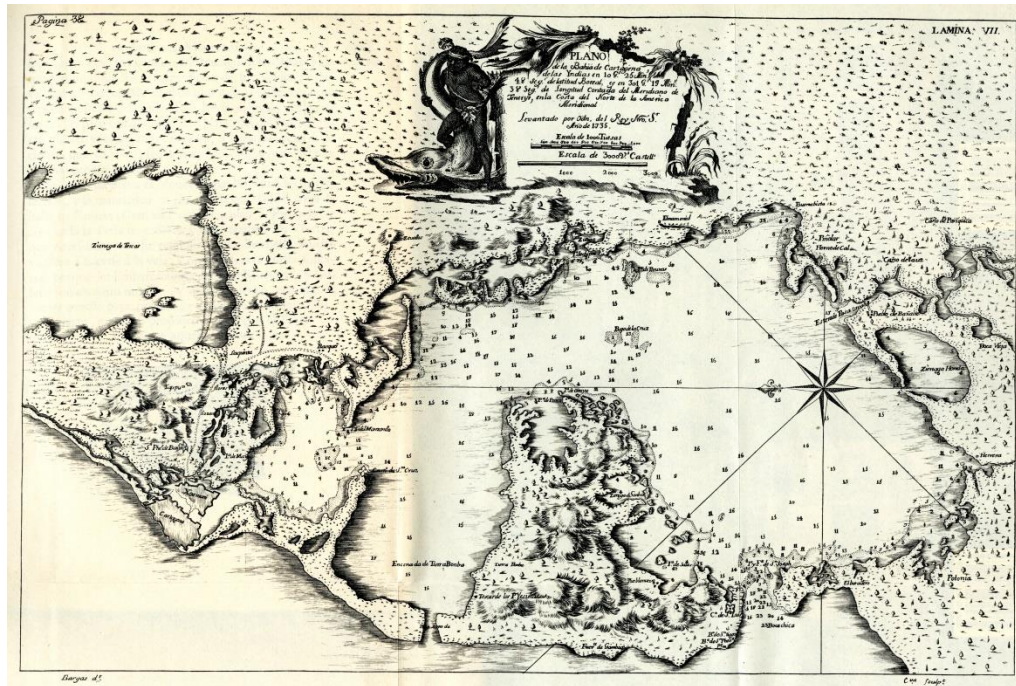
Cartagena, Marialabaja and the Otra Costa, the Darién.

Polonia: place, memory, power

On an unusually cool afternoon, 86 years old Señor Fermín, his jittery dog, named after a biblical monster, Leviathán, and I embarked on a journey to Polonia. We walked behind the first houses of Ararca, we strolled and climbed and trudged along the track. The *monte* started changing when we left behind the sound of the *picó* (giant loudspeakers). Ararca didn't exist anymore. The *monte* got thicker and greener. It smelled of dampness and dust at the same time. It sprang from the track and curled above and around the *lomas* (hills) on which the earth gradually rearranged. It met my eyes when I raised my head instead of stretching along with the path. The *monte* gradually turned into a velvety tunnel. It promised and suggested things as it hid them. I thought I would soon glimpse the sea and that the simultaneous sight of the concealing *monte* and of the open, revealing beaches would help me to understand the stories about the past. Leviathán was the first to notice that things were going to change. After a curve we almost stumbled upon an iron gate guarded by uniformed men. I felt, for the second time, a sense of dislocation. In an instant the *monte* had changed again and showed its ability to confound, as in the stories people told about *brujas*, entrapping villagers within and through the vegetation. I didn't know if I was more unsettled by young men wielding heavy weapons in the bush or by the uniforms, which I couldn't recognize or match with any institutional corp. With the firm but courteous no of a company's private police, equipped as an anti-guerrilla fighting squad, ended my only trip to the old *estancia* Polonia.



Copy of the Map of Cartagena and its Bay drawn by Juan de Herrera y Sotomayor (1721 approx.)
 Note Polonia on the south-eastern side of the "Ysla de Varu".



Map drawn by Antonio de Ulloa in 1735, Based on an earlier map, realized by Juan de Herrera y Sotomayor in 1721. Polonia is on the south-eastern tip of the map.

Polonia, an old colonial *hacienda*, which already figures in 18th century maps and probably existed considerably earlier, is Ararqueros' place of origin. Older Islanders have often visited part of the *hacienda* or have worked on and around its land. When, desperate to know more about a place which was so important in the history and in the social and economic topography of the Island, and which had even seeped into my night dreams, I did some research in Cartagena's historical archive, I came across Sebastián de Villanueva's will. This man, a distinguished member of Cartagena's elite, having neither offspring nor spouse, left his house in the Old Town, his *estancia Cocón* and his *finca, Polonia*, with the ovens for lime-making, the animals, instruments and slaves they contained, to his relatives, who lived across the Ocean. Sebastián de Villanueva's maternal grandfather (his mother was Juana Paula Arévalo de Villanueva) was Don Antonio de Arévalo, the Spanish engineer who planned the Bay's most ambitious fortifications, in the second half of the XVIII century. The *hacienda* was then auctioned and bought, in 1862, by Manuel González Brieva, another wealthy land- and slave-owner^{xi} and, curiously, the man from whom the *comuneros* of Barú had bought, eleven years before, the already mentioned 7 *caballerías* of land that were, in theory, to be held in common forever.

Polonia engulfed elderly Ararqueros' memories. Not only was it a place of origin. It gave them a more complex, historical identity. "*Los Ararqueros son Poloñeros*", many still said during my fieldwork. Polonia was the ancient *estancia* in which the first Ararqueros, so the story goes, were born, lived and worked. For the youngsters it was an off-limit but strangely relatively close place. Development had come with programs and activities allegedly aiming to recover the villagers' buried or half-forgotten past and secondary school kids had started learning that Manuel Villeros, whose name was chosen to baptize the new "*Casa de la Cultura*", was the man who first set foot in what was going to become current Ararca. Polonia had been claimed back (*reclamar*) and the village had rolled down (*vino rodando*) until reaching the spot in which people had decided to settle and had become Ararqueros.

All versions of the story coincided in saying that Poloñeros had been working for a long time on that land. It was “their” land”. Old Ararquero families (Villeros, Morales, Arévalo...) had lived there although, with time, other families had moved to Polonia, people from other parts of the region, like Turbaco, in order to work in the *hacienda*. Polonia was so old that people had lived and died there. Some people assured that they knew where Poloñeros’ cemetery stood. Polonia was the place where smuggling boats had arrived and where goods, coming from all over the Caribbean, had been unloaded. And according to El Viejo a single man had dismantled the village (*desbaratado el pueblo*), a Juan Manuel Porto, a white man with a presumptuous (in Cartagena’s history) surname who had wanted to handle the smuggling scene without interferences and whom, had he lived in current times, the “*muchachada*” (young boys) of Ararca would had killed without too many compliments.

The rest of Ararqueros, though, had other things to say. They recounted a story where a Bocachiquero, Faustino, who, as a member of a nearby community, had ancient geographical and social links with the island, betrayed all Poloñeros and “sold” Polonia to a rich foreigner, a Mr Bent or Mr Bentes^{xiii} (this was the way in which people pronounced the surname), for some people an Englishman, for others a Canadian. Mr B., despite being the “foreigners’ consul” (*el consul de los extranjeros*) had supposedly been married to a Colombian woman. She was the one who, when her husband died, had sold the land (remember the story of the *cacique* of Barú!) to *Cementos Caribe*, the cement firm that later became part of Argos, one of the most flourishing Colombian corporations, which during my fieldwork claimed to own a huge part of the island^{xiii}. These stories also featured another character, the Gringo, who far from being a north-American as his name would imply, was a white man with an ancient and prestigious *cartagenero* surname who, it seemed, still lived in Panama at the times of my fieldwork, according to some islanders. The Gringo allegedly worked as Mr B.’s administrator and he was portrayed as a greedy, violent man who threatened the farmers who had decided to stay in/around Polonia. El Viejo’s voice trembled even more when he remembered how *el Gringo* had almost knocked him out with the butt of his gun and with what insolence he had talked about the shortcomings of “*ustedes, los negros*” (you, the blacks). El Viejo and other villagers had decided to get together and form a “*sindicato*” (union) in order to defend themselves against forced eviction. They had hired a lawyer but the *Gringo* had bought him off and even bragged about it with the villagers.

Esperanza was “Mano” Manuel’s granddaughter. Her grandparents, she said, had made “*todo esto*” (all this). She told me the story I had heard other times, another fragment of the mosaic of memories which simultaneously constructed and blurred Polonia. She recounted how Manuel Villeros (“*Mano*” Manuel) and Leopoldo Pájaro, her grandfathers, with “Mana” Rosa (Rosalia Pérez) and other Poloñeros had “opened the path” (*abrieron camino*), and by “opening up here” and “opening up there”, making *rozas* and *ranchitos* (small cabins), they had reached the place where Ararca would stand. The area fell within Santa Ana’s jurisdiction and Santaneros didn’t want the Poloñeros to settle there. After some negotiations they were given the permission to stay. Other stories recounted how Ararqueros had to struggle against Santaneros’ pretensions that “Ararca was really Santa Ana”^{xiv} or how, later, some Santaneros had started to live with (*se echaron con*) Ararqueros.

Esperanza believed that Ararqueros, by becoming what they were, had lost all the promises that Polonia, a rich, bountiful, isolated and yet an open, strategic place, had offered them. She blamed Mano Manuel, who had given up and decided to move so far away from the old *estancia*, and she blamed Faustino, the first among the *corruptos* who

would later come. And she also blamed people's lack of understanding, their odd habits, which now seemed unreasonable.

“That land, Polonia, was the natives' land. But the old people of those times used to get out of certain plots and get inside (others). So they went out of Polonia. And now Polonia, see how it is. It's beautiful, it's big, it stands by the sea (*agua salada*). They worked for themselves (Poloñeros). And once those who wanted to work had to take the *patrón's* surname. Yes. [...] Because the *patrón* required that.”

Mano Manuel and his companions were “natives”, Esperanza and other Ararqueros always remarked. They knew the place, they knew how to clear the *monte*, and how to make *rozas* and the small *ranchos* that people used to set up next to the plots. And the whole island was their native land. This is why they went so far away. Poloñeros' Polonia, no matter what the extension of the *estancia* that in colonial documents is called Polonia^{xv} might have been, stretched towards Barú. It was “huge”, people said. It was “beautiful”. It was a port and all sorts of people and things would arrive there. Goods came “from all over the world” and other people arrived from “everywhere” to get hold of them. Ararca, the poorest village of the island, the one which was chosen among the poorest villages of Colombia, to implement the first program for the eradication of what the state now calls “extreme poverty”, could have been a rich place.

People “worked for themselves” there. Esperanza spontaneously compared Poloñeros' autonomy with the loss of freedom that working for a *patrón* entailed. As in other contexts the experience of slavery, almost a taboo, never explicitly mentioned, was passed down as a reflection on the constrictions and injustices of paid labour and the ambiguity of the relationships between *patrones* and workers. Among the conditions *patrones* used to impose to their workers in Polonia, had been the curious requirement, her grandmother told Esperanza, of changing their own surname into the *patrón's* one. This was how people forgot their real surnames, Esperanza had been taught (the Arévalo family's real surname had been lost in this way), because once they had been baptised with the *patrón's* name they would keep it forever. Esperanza felt that Poloñeros had been fooled by people who possessed a “knowledge” which they, with their habit of moving from a plot to another and of not caring about delimiting the land, had lacked. The same was true of elderly Ararqueros, like Esperanza's husband, who had never wanted to fence the land he had known as the palm of his hands and on which he had worked

“People didn't know before. Because that *gringo* who bought it, he came and said: well, you are going to get out of here because I am the owner. The owner?! We are going to buy the “*mejoras*”^{xvii}. They cheated all the people...he gave them about a thousand pesos each...He gave thirty to Faustino. People saw him building a house in Bocachica, a nice house. Faustino?! People said, this is when they said (that he had sold the land). But if had been like nowadays Faustino would have ended up dead.[...] Then the Gringo sold to Caribe (*Cementos Caribe*, later *Argos*). If he had sold just Polonia! If he hadn't sold the Sendal, Portonao... Polonia was all that. El Sendal almost gets to Barú. And all that was sold for thirty thousand miserable pesos.”

Old people's (*los viejos*) practices, their relationship with the island, their skills and values, becomes “ignorance” and lack of the useful kinds of knowledge, in a narrative which blends hegemonic discourses about what being civilized and educated means with glimpses of alternative moral landscapes. Whatever capacities the old people might have had they couldn't foresee what would come to pass in the future or transmute their connection with the land into a convenient monetary value. Their work, the care they took with the land, their skills were only worth the “*mejoras*”, an almost symbolic compensation that peasants who have farmed on the state's land get before being evicted. Their work and the collective and individual stories behind it seemed to reflect

institutional and elites' perception of black peasants' (un-)worthiness. Faustino, like other current leaders, couldn't help but reveal his treason by setting up a house which marked his difference from the others. And when looking at the immense profits that the land within and around the old *estancia* are yielding now, it is clear that Faustino's grandiose plans notwithstanding, he sold his people for a pittance and was himself cheated.

Memories about Polonia seemed to recapitulate the history of black and *mestizo costeño* peasants. When Islanders talked about Polonia they were referring to the land which comprehended the *estancia* and that which surrounded it. Colonial haciendas had not precise physical borders. Free tenants, peasants who occasionally worked for *hacendados*, and slaves lived close to each other (Fals Borda, 1979; 1987 Meisel Roca, 1979). As in other Caribbean contexts (see Besson, 2002) common landholdings were essential for free peasants' social reproduction. Enslaved and free peasants' *rozas* were often set in the same areas. As Fals Borda(1979) reiterated, the *monte* functioned in the Costa as an "economic reservoir". The Monte had extraordinary productive, social, emotional and spiritual functions. Runaway slaves and *arrochelados* lived within and off the *monte*. Tenants moved a bit farther inside the *monte* in order to avoid paying a rent to the *hacendados*. The historical portrait of the Bay's peasants also seems to fit Jean Besson's (2002) ideas that Caribbean post-slavery peasants' social practices were the result of the combined traditions of maroons and of enslaved proto-peasants.

Polonia encapsulates the history of capital and state encroachment over the Island's territories. It was a long process. This is probably one of the reasons why some people (as the historical notes about Mr B. suggest), placed the abandonment of Polonia in the fifties (during Rojas Pinilla's mandate) and others suggested earlier or later dates. Dispossession was an extended (and ongoing) process, which underwent acceleration in certain historical moments (as after the Independence wars or during the Liberal republic of the 1930s/1940s) (Tovar Pinzón, 1997; Bernal Castillo, 2012; Perez Martinez, 2004). *Hacendados*, as in other coastal contexts, gradually extended their property, occupying, fencing and registering the land which had been traditionally used by farmers and paying little, when they were obliged to do so, for the work which had preserved and ameliorated the land throughout time and space. Various historical works sustain villagers' memories about people who went away, people who stayed behind and were, later, forcibly evicted, as landowners sought to further increase, enclose and exploit their holdings, and of people who turned from farmers into *hacienda* labourers (as in Fals Borda, 1975; 1987; Pérez Martínez, 2004).

If most people combined different stories in single narratives it was not only because popular memory is inherently fragmented and contradictory, being as it is the product of historical marginality (Gramsci,1971). It is not only because popular memories condense diverse social hegemonic and counterhegemonic points of view and they always suggest and point towards the "half concealed words of others"(Bakhtin in Smith, 2004). It is also because the narrative, cognitive and imaginative practices which shape "dispersed", "discontinuous" and "fragmented" (Losonczy, 2002) memory regimes also signify local world-places and historical collective experiences by associating and connecting similar occurrences into themes and similar emotional responses to comparable events into "structures of feelings" (as in Williams, 1977). Michael Taussig has often used in his works Walter Benjamin's famous quotes about memory and its working through associations and similitudes. "To articulate the past historically doesn't mean to recognize it the way it really was". It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger"(Benjamin in Taussig, p.4). Narratives about Polonia condensed (and sometimes blurred the difference between) black peasants' past and ongoing dispossession: a set of social dynamics and traumatic events which a devoted

work of precise historical contextualization could perhaps translate into precise dates but which were also perceived, felt and remembered as a single process and, occasionally, mingled into a single event in which the vagueness of details and historical frames was compensated by the intensity of the events of the emotions they evoked.

With the expression “chronotope” Bakhtin referred to a “scale of spatial and temporal horizons within which some events are understood as meaningfully occurring” (Bakhtin in French, 2012, p.). Polonia’s “chronotope” was constituted, with various spatiotemporal intensities, by a vast area, spanning from the northernmost tip Ararca occupies to the Sendal, which stretched towards Barú, and by the long historical process through which black people were dispossessed through successive re-articulations of violent practices, including modifications of the legal system, co-optation and internal division, expulsion, physical violence and by variously implemented “techniques of subjectivities” (Ong, 2006).

Most authors writing about “collective memory”, from Halwachs (1992) and Nora (1996) to Connerton (1989), stress that the retrieval and circulation of particular memories are usually associated to concerns about current events. In the whole island “development” projects looming closer and closer in space and time caused memories of past abuses and land grabbing came alive and dialogically interacted during gathering or informal conversations. When I visited El Viejo with Fernán, the one of the leaders of Ararca’s community council, the elderly Ararquero declared that he wouldn’t get fooled into relaying Polonia’s story. He was discursively enacting a contradiction, as while denying the possibility of recalling he made past events and patterns slip and re-arrange into present concerns. In his crackling, voice he explained to the half-intrigued and half-mortified anthropologist and to a half-amused and half-embarrassed leader that he would only talk in exchange for a conspicuous sum of money. More than that, for “*un dineral*”, a river of money with which, in case the retelling of that story caused him to die, his family could survive. He hinted to the fact that a man—, a lawyer who was helping some islanders with their claims but had also been rumoured of asking for land, and for too much of it, in exchange for his work—has spoken with him and had told him that “that company” which now owned Polonia would rather give him money than give him back his land. His speech also mixed and associated events of the past, of his eviction and the failed *sindicato*, with present events like the occupation of Coquito, an area close to the village, which had been accompanied by accusations, rumours about various villagers’ and external actors’ motives, and with the lures and threats of current “megaprojects”.

Polonia still mattered. And it matters. The issues of black peasants’ struggles and of the protracted history of their dispossession should be addressed with honest intentions, their still too often silenced voices and dismissed stories taken into account and remade into history and projects for the future of the island and of Cartagena. Señora Liduvina, for instance, remembered Polonia vividly. Her *santanero* uncles and her aunt owned part of that land. Señora Liduvina, in Barú, like Esperanza, in Ararca, remembered the bountiful ocean and the lush *monte*. And it was strange that I had just shown up there, she considered, as some days before our conversation, the theme of Polonia had slid into the chat she was having with a younger relative.

“...It was beautiful! Some time ago I asked a girl who lives with my sister’s son. I said: well, and does Polonia still exist?” She told me: yes madam. She told me: *it still exists*. Because I thought: the *gringo* sold it...those were everybody’s lands...”

The past is a “legacy” and, at the same time, a “project” (Dirlik, 1997). Several ways exist, not all of them explicit and direct, of acknowledging historical violence. Some of them are accompanied by a timid unfolding of alternatives, of residual openness, as if

people reminded themselves and their listeners of natural and human resilience, as if they suggested possibilities which official chronicles and linear history deny but memory reaffirms, despite the arrogance of the powerful and the “corruption” of the compliant.

“When the *cuellos blancos* came”: re-articulations of regional, national and trans-national power relations

Senor Raúl’s origins story acknowledged strategic movement, purpose-oriented movement, as a normal facet of social life (“As we travel...they also travel”, he explained, referring to potentially threatening individuals and groups from outside the island). But contacts, in the past, had been more sporadic and had not threatened to alter dramatically the physical and social space of the Island. There was a turning point in people’s narratives. The moment in which things started changing, although those changes would often become recognisable only later.

Villagers talked about the time in which the first “*cuellos blancos*” came. The expression can be used as the equivalent of the English “white-collar” but in this case it doesn’t refer solely to class and labour. *Cuellos blancos* is a flexible, ambiguous expression which conflates class, race and geographical provenience. It is often used interchangeably with *plumas blancas* (white feathers), or, more rarely, with the “capital” (*el capital*). Around the seventies wealthy Cartageneros who had fished for decades around Barú and the Islands of Rosario, started building “*casas de recreo*” (holiday houses) on Barú’s territory. Villagers who “sold” them their land (and I will come back to these “sales”) would often ask new landowners the permission to build a small house on the back of their property and they would then start working for their newly acquired “*patrones*”^{xvii}. Thus, at the beginning, this spatial modification was accompanied by a re-articulation of social relations around the ancient model of *patronazgo*, creating ambiguous relationships in which affection and mutual obligations (often reinforced by god-parenthood) mingled with labour and with economic interests.

Later, in the eighties and in the nineties, other individuals, coming from different social groups, arrived and took the place elite Cartageneros had occupied. The islands of Rosario, that Baruleros had historically used as bases for fishing expeditions and, later, for coconut cultivation and on whose mosquito-plagued territory few villagers had wanted to live, acquired the reputation of tropical paradise that they still retain. Politicians, successful businessmen and TV stars started building houses or buying property within the Island. The ways villagers looked at their land changed. The parts of the *monte* which had been close to the sea hadn’t been considered good for farming but with the first wealthy *cuellos blancos* and with tourism it became the most valuable and sought after part of Barú. People, in those times, at the beginning of the touristic era, sold their land for little money. And as they worked for these wealthy individuals, as custodians, cooks, maids, boatmen, gardeners, sometimes participating in crucial family events, some of the *patrones* slowly turned their property into touristic enterprises.

Then the era of the *traquetos* (members of the drugs cartels) came. In Ararca and Barú alike several individuals and families worked for these people. Villagers usually had good memories about those times. *Narcos* were interested in maintaining good relationships with the villagers and they paid exceptionally high salaries for local labour. Some villagers in Barú claimed that *traquetos* were better *patrones* than current ones and questioned the hypocrisy and interests behind the division into “honest” (politicians, businessmen) and “dishonest” owners.

And *traquetos* brought their understandings of masculinity and practices, which blending—as Álvarez (2004) noted for the Andean region—with the long established

model of the powerful *hacendado* came to define successful masculinity. I was told stories of fabulous parties featuring expensive drinks, plenty of seafood and beautiful teenage models. Simón, in Barú, recalled that with the money he had made by working for some *traquetos*, using sand to replenish the marshland and thus increasing the extension of their employers' property, he felt as some kind of “*Pablito*” (Pablo Escobar, powerful drugs cartel leader) and he described the male collective extravagance of those times.

Yet, drugs didn't come to the island in those years. It did it much later and it became a permanent feature of the villages. Poor *corregimientos* and Cartagena's slums constituted an exceptional opportunity to get rid of low quality substances. As in other South American peripheries crack (*bazuco*, in Colombia) turned into an efficacious weapon of destruction of popular class youth. Islanders' residual smuggling and travelling would be exploited by the drug trafficking transnational industry. Various male villagers, during my fieldwork, were serving terms in the United States for drugs trafficking. They were the expendable lower rungs of the business. “Getting lost” on a boat, a common theme of islanders' stories (and even of its songs), turned into a way of alluding to the possibilities and dangers of these kinds of travels, where business-dealers and competitors were rumoured to easily sacrifice local seamen's lives for profit.

According to some villagers, despite the era of the *traquetos* having come to an end with the confiscation of the famous ones' grandiose villas, with their demolition and sacking or with their refashioning into the dwellings of state officials or other wealthy individuals, nobody could really say *traquetos* were really gone until they were arrested, taken away or extradited to the US. People often pointed at the same murky connections between official enterprises and illegal affairs Gledhill (1999) refers to when writing about “unspeakable connections” and “shadow states” in Latin America (see also Harvey, 2014). Likewise, local researchers, like Sarmiento Anzola (2010), ask their readers to pay attention to the scandals surrounding development and money laundering in Cartagena and to draw their own conclusions.

When development came

How had the *cuellos blancos* ended up owning the land? First of all, big companies—as the land-owners of the past they sometimes replaced—had simply swallowed up people's *rozas* and village land in a geographical (and social) milieu marked until the seventies at least by the lack of precise borders and by the importance of face to face and customary arrangements. People who had traditionally kept cattle in certain areas of the *monte*, for instance, suddenly discovered that they could not retrieve them anymore, as the land had been enclosed. In other cases some villagers, threatened or preoccupied for the presence of armed guards, had stopped using certain areas.

Secondly, as projections of future tourism-based astronomical profits soared and circulated and with the increase of touristic activities in and around Cartagena, some individuals, ignoring the intricate web of social and familial relations to which the land was attached, “sold” family land to crafty intermediaries and business-men. Moreover, such transactions were in many cases not permitted by the law as they concerned *baldíos*, territories which according to the Colombian law pertain to the State, and were later “legalized” and recorded through the complicity of power brokers.

Thirdly, various individuals were forced to sell their land to alleged entrepreneurs and intermediaries, some introducing themselves as “lawyers”, as it happened in a wider scale in other Colombian regions. Finally, for a long time, before land prices spiralled up and people started to try take advantage of their situation, villagers sometimes transferred

their land to other individuals in exchange for little money. As in the cases in which island's farmers were evicted from their land and then compensated with meagre sums for their *mejoras*, even in the cases in which islanders consciously chose to sell their property (and in the cases in which it would have been possible as they had legal titles), valuable extensions of land were sold for small sums of money, which had nevertheless appealed to poor villagers. The commercial value of the plots, after the sales, would immediately increase (this was the case, for instance, of Coquito and of the land on which the Decameron hotel was set up).

Some of the above-mentioned commercial operations have been subsequently the focus of claims and accusations (and of about 60 prosecutions), which are still pending. Islanders denounced on various occasions the fact that renowned individuals, pertaining to the Colombian elites, had, with the complicity of some government officials, forged documents recording supposed transactions with land-owning islanders and subsequently "sold" these plots of land to the State^{xviii}, obtaining astronomic profits.

Meanwhile, between 1993 and 1994, the Colombian Government approved the creation of two touristic "free zones" in the island of Barú and precisely by the *Ciénaga* of Portonaíto, the most valuable part of the island. Influential members of *costeño* and national business elites, who, by that time, owned vast sections of land in the island, were well-placed to develop the new projects.

In 2009 the first massive tourist structure of the island, the Decameron Hotel (run by an Ecuadorian businessman and bought in 2014 by the Santo Domingo Group) opened near Playa Blanca. During my fieldwork several Ararqueros worked at the Decameron Hotel. Women, like my friend Karen, were mainly employed as maids. "*Poner la hoja en el Cameron*" [sic] ("give a CV to the Decameron") was the first step young Ararqueros took in their post-college search for employment. Karen, like most villagers, had been grateful to have the opportunity to earn a salary that allowed her to continue her studies in Cartagena. She ultimately decided not to go back to work after the last of the usual unpaid "breaks" employers went through (which villagers called "holiday" or *reposo*, although most were hired through temporary contracts usually expiring on determinate periods of the year, like Christmas. Workers could be then recalled or left to "rest"). Like other women she complained about the hard work, the low wages, the way she was mistreated by the staff members who worked in higher positions and by female fellow workers from Santa Ana, who usually made life impossible for Ararqueras. Security guards were ordered to check all the maids after work in order to prevent thefts and she felt that some abused the power they were given. Tourists could be quarrelsome, ill-mannered and offensive towards female workers. During the second part of my fieldwork I was told that the hotel had fired two employees, a Cartagenera and a villager, who had tried to organize a *sindicato* (workers' union). People complained but most felt they had to accept those conditions to avoid losing their jobs.

Near Ararca and Santa Ana, land claims and conflicts between the state and the villagers escalated, as the latter were prevented to enter or use their lands. The skirmishes included people's allegations of having been shot by armed guards employed by the land-owning companies, evictions, judicial processes and the murder, in Cartagena, of a lawyer who was defending Santaneros' rights. Playa Blanca, a beach which sustained more than 40 families, mainly from Santa Ana and Ararca, who sold food and drinks, rented hammocks, offered massages and hair-plaiting, had been claimed by Corplaya, a mixed company which represented the interests of the State and of the landowners who wanted to develop touristic projects in that part of the island. At the beginning of 2014, villagers' mass eviction from the beach, advertised in the media as a much needed "ecological recovery" campaign, was halted by a judicial sentence which established villagers' right

to be consulted before a concession could be granted to the company^{xix} (El Universal, 28-01-2004).

In the meantime several websites promoted in Colombia and abroad *Marina de Barú*, the project designed by Playa Blanca Baru S.A^{xx}, promising turquoise waters and green palms, sailable channels, magnificent villas, and a 18 holes golf course. On the other side of the *Canal del Dique* stands Mamonal, Cartagena's industrial district. Commercial interests promoting two apparently conflicting images of the island have found ways to accommodate each other: on one side, Bahaire, Puerto Bahía^{xxi}, a high-tech port reaching out towards Panama Channel and its north-American and Asian promises and ten kilometres south of the port a free trade touristic zone sold as a pristine paradise for golf-clubs swinging nature-lovers.

It is easy to underestimate the impact that the beginning of development projects had on Ararca. Ararca isn't what it used to be, people said at the end of my fieldwork. A series of national and international NGOs, whose support has been usually secured by governmental and private programs like *Red Unidos* or by *Fundación Puerto Bahía*, have improved Ararqueros' lives by contributing to the construction, enhancement and renewal of the sewage and water systems and of the humblest houses. My landlady, who lived by the *Transversal de Barú*, which was being built during my fieldwork, had received some construction material, that she used to pave her house, and to build a bathroom. Through *Red Unidos*^{xxii}, various educational programs have been initiated, some of which entail certain forms of economic subsidies and health campaigns.

Fundación Puerto Bahía had become omnipresent, in Ararca, during the last part of my fieldwork. Its four-wheel drive trucks and its social workers, with their trainers, white t-shirts and baseball caps, became one of the most visible features of the tiny village. Puerto Bahía popped up into the conversations I had with people in unexpected moments. Many Ararqueros thought that Ararca had been finally blessed. A small village—one that had been considered the “poorest in Colombia”, so poor that only “Africa” surpassed its misery, people declared with a curious mix of pride and gravity—had been suddenly invested by modernity. Ararca was going to become a small Cartagena, some young villagers dreamed. Ararca had become Cartagena, Emilia told me on the phone in December 2013. Evangelical villagers, like her, were particularly attracted by the idea of prosperity, to be achieved through the conjoined efforts of corporate investment and of villagers' investment in the self-civilizing programs which various *fundaciones* upheld.

Other Ararqueros were much more sceptical. Some feared that Puerto Bahía would end up owning the village. They were suspicious of the interests embedded within the apparent display of generosity and behind the eagerness to collaborate with a previously neglected village. The profits reaped by these individuals and groups, people imagined, had to be so grandiose that they, the villagers, were the ones who would be cheated in the end, like it had always been. Most took advantage of whatever came their way.

When the “roots” crawled back: ethnicity and community organization

As it had happened in the Colombian Pacific, there was a strict connection between “development” (as a set of discourses and practices) and the beginning of the re-ethnicization process of *costeño* blacks (Restrepo, 2004; 2008). Development, neoliberal politics, globalization and re-ethnicization were inevitably linked (Gros, 2000). Ethnicity-based identity politics seemed to entail the abandonment of the projects and rhetoric of racial *mestizaje* that most Latin American nations sought to achieve since the 19th century (Chaves and Zambrano, 2006) or, perhaps, constituted an alternative way of national

integration (Gros, 2000). In any case, various supra-national institutions and, later, governmental and non-governmental organizations, started, during the last decades, representing “national alterity” as ethnic difference (Segato, 2007; Wade, 2006).

The new constitution of 1991 defined Colombia a “multicultural” nation. The legislation which developed later gave national “ethnic groups” a set of rights over their territories, first of all the right to have collective land titles and that of being consulted, through the mechanism of the previous consultation (*consulta previa*), about development projects. Indigenous organizations had been preponderant in the negotiations with state institutions which predated the approval of the new constitution and had a richer history of organization. The idea of blackness which informed the Law 70 was hence modelled on the national view of indigeneity. Ethnicity was considered an attribute of the populations whose main territory was that of Pacific river-valleys, with a strong “cultural identity” and still living of their “traditional economic activities”. In Colombia, the Pacific Coast and especially the Department of Chocó, has usually been represented as the isolated, pristine, reservoir of “black culture” and could perhaps fit the official criteria for the definition of black ethnicity. In the Caribbean Coast, though, only Palenqueros (inhabitants of Palenque de San Basilio) seemed to meet those requirements.

The *Costa* has usually been portrayed as simultaneously white and black (Wade, 1997; 2009) and “whiteness” and “blackness” made to signify different facets of national and regional society in different moments (Wade, 2009), from coarseness and lack of civilization to modernity, from sensuality and eroticism to the dangers of untamed passions unleashed and moulded by the tropical latitudes. Most post-independence political rhetoric, like in other Latin American contexts, depicted miscegenation as desirable. “Creolization” also functioned as a strategy for mobilizing and taking advantage of black populations in certain historical moments while avoiding discussing explicitly racial discrimination (Múnera, 2005; Lasso, 2006). The concept of “mestizo competence”, devised by Elizabeth Cunin (2003), captures Cartagenos’ capacity for “play(ing) with colour and its meaning”, for “contextualize(ing)” appearances, and for “adapting to [different] codes”(p.261). “Mestizo competence” proved useful to reflect on the simultaneously foundational and elusive character of racial categories in Cartagena. It forces 21st century visitors and researchers to look back at the “great masquerade” Vidal Ortega (2002) referred to when writing about colonial Cartagena, a city which buttressed hegemonic powers with strategic entitlements to various kinds of transgression.

In the island, during my fieldwork, race rarely entered conversations. But when, in Cartagena, I would tell people that I was doing some research in the island, its inhabitants’ “blackness” often leapt into the conversation, as I was usually warned about islanders’ *brujerías*, and especially about their sexual magic. On the other hand, in Barú and, above all, in Ararca, whiteness was associated with wealth and some of the most difficult moments of my fieldwork have been those in which I struggled against people’s belief that I secretly owned an island, that I had or I was planning to have my personal NGO, that I was a (rich) tourist to whom fabulous sums of money could be asked instead of standard fares and that I had chosen baggy, “Hindu” clothes (which didn’t seem to appeal to most villagers) in order to fool people into believing that I was “poor”, as many rich were said to do, in the city and in the Islands of Rosario. In these cases, blackness and whiteness were related to social class and to physical attributes which stood for different possibilities, suggestive of different life trajectories and of a different use of space. This difference was often signified through a repertoire of images and categories shaped by tourism and by the kinds of interactions it promoted in those specific locations.

But blackness and whiteness also entered conversations when these veered towards reproduction or sexuality. And blackness was something certain local people

possessed in greater quantities than others and that condensed into the width of the mouth, of the nose, and on the type of hair, (*pelo malo* or *pelo rucho*, kinky hair, being closely associated with blackness) people possessed. These physical characteristics were usually considered in informal match-making contexts and weighed against other factors (education, provenience, job...). Strangely, some counted more than others. Straight hair, for instance, was valued more favourably than a lighter skin colour. An educated dark-skinned Barulero, one who had gone to the University and worked abroad, was not so *morenito* as he might have been if he had devoted his life to fishing. But the same individual, as it often happened, might decide to marry a fair-skinned woman and would have fairer children. *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), in Barú, the moment in which many villagers who live outside the island go back to it, was, for me, an introduction to economically successful villagers' progressive whitening.

I was "different". It is difficult to ascertain how much of that difference was conceived of in racial terms, as race itself is constructed through entangled imbrications of gender, class, origins, behaviour. I was different because I came from "there" (*allá, donde Usted vive*), there being Europe, Spain, Italy, the United States, Bogotá, Medellín, a city in general or a middle class household. And race was continuously related to reproduction and sexuality in these discourses. In "those" places, people commented, considering my childlessness, offspring didn't come as easily as in the island. As for the reasons, different people attributed them to a variety of factors, from the weather or the fish most islanders regularly consumed, to "machismo" or to islanders' lack of opportunities, education and diversions. In many instances, nevertheless, it was whiteness which was associated with unrestrained sexuality. Stories of rich, white landowners and of tourists lusting after men and women of any age and colour abounded, in Barú and in Cartagena, where in some *barrios*, for instance, Italians (as other white people) had a reputation of drug-addicts, women-traffickers and perverts. In one case it was established that I eluded the stereotype because I came from a peripheral island (Sicily) characterized, someone had discovered, by a "traditional" and "conservative" culture.

Development and post-1991 state policies brought ethnicity-based politics to Cartagena and to its rural areas. Not many villagers, apart from those who worked with the Black Community Councils or had other kinds of political training, expressed ideas of belonging or narrated identity in ethnic terms. But I did see changes, even within the relatively short time span of my fieldwork. A host of associations, NGOs, and *fundaciones* implemented programs and organized events where ethnicity, usually epitomized by music genres like *champeta*, *mapalé* or *bullerengue*, was performed and thus disseminated as a somehow self-explanatory social category. Youngsters were taught to preserve traditional music and dances (during my fieldwork, interestingly, local "traditions", were taught at school by a Chocoano dance teacher and by a music teacher from San Jacinto). TV programs like the evening *telenovela* which was famous in 2012, centred on famous musician Joe Arroyo's life, reinforced associations between "blackness", music, sensuality and entertainment.

In 2010 two civil associations had denounced that the public/private consortium which was building the Road to Barú hadn't respected the obligation to consult the affected populations which Law 70 established. According to the *Alcaldía* (Municipality) of Cartagena consultations with the islanders hadn't been required as the INCODER (Institute of Rural Development) had not recognized the territory on which the road was being built as "black communities' land". Moreover the institute which was to concede the appropriate environmental license (*Cardique, Corporación para el desarrollo del Canal del Dique*) had declared that the villages of the island didn't possess the requisites,

to be defined as “black communities”. As in a case about black Samaros (Santa Marta’s inhabitants) discussed by Bettina Ngweno (2007), islanders, for parts of the State, might as well have been “black” but did not have any specific “culture” or “traditional activities”, and therefore any rights to collective property or to be consulted about projects to be implemented within their territory.

Some people in Barú remembered and resented INCODER’s pronouncements. Villagers, according to Ruby, a member of the local Community Council, had, in the past, been proud of being Baruleros. Baruleros also had meant “black” but blackness hadn’t consumed and swallowed up *barulero*-ness. They had been the “poor” (*los pobres*), as I sometimes heard in elderly people’s stories. They had been “villagers”. They had been “farmers”. Now they increasingly were “community” (*comunidad*). I don’t know if and to what extent *comunidad* has been used to make sense of and to narrate connectedness and belonging in the past. I suspect that *comunidad* has arrived together with ethnic politics. This does not mean, of course, that villagers did not have other ways of defining and preserving “communality”, which, as the documents and the stories related to the use of common lands, for instance, show, must have been in the past a major concern. The “*pro-indiviso*” clause was connected indeed, in 1851 Baruleros’ deeds, with the survival of the village as a social, relational, and material world.

There are researchers, who question the ethnic turn in Latin American social movements, thinking that there is much to lose for marginal social groups when the representation of alterity is detached from the network of historical events and relations which contributed to its creation and it is, instead, reproduced in a global arena and given meanings shaped in Euro-American contexts. (Segato, 2007). Others, conversely, see indigenous “cosmopolitanism” as a positive turn, one which does not necessarily imply loss of independence or a strategic provincialization of global meanings and practices (Gow, 1997).

The debates is still open but, in the case of the Island, bell hooks’ writings provide, I think, other possibilities. The acknowledgement, the re-appropriation and the re-signification of historical marginality can re-compose various kinds of oppression and different narrations of identity. The “margins”, as social, geographical, spiritual boundary spaces, are slits within which a variety of human experiences can be accommodated. The individual and collective experience of racial oppression does not necessarily need to obstruct or marginalize other kinds of narrations of historical suffering or different understandings of resilience, autonomy and resistance. Race itself is composed of various fibres whose texture and weaving give substance to other social categories. Stressing the importance of the inclusive and counterhegemonic experience of the *Rochela* could for instance, help activists to conceptualize difference, identity and communality in novel and more inclusive ways.

Arturo Escobar (2008) recently suggested that black organizations’ activism should produce spaces and practices through which “new ways of *knowing, being, doing*, might emerge as historical possibilities out of given problematic situations” (p.203). A place-based identity politics, in order to be effective, needs to open up real spaces for new sets of interactions, for collaboration with “other radical advocacies of social change” (Dirlik, 1997, p.236). It is too early to know if the return of the “afro”, a set of ideas, discourses and identity making technologies based on activism and associated with certain practices will result in a radical change in the ways “origins” (Losonczy, 2002) are conceived and narrated. There were some signs, in the island, that changes might be under way, at least for the individuals involved in black community councils based activism. Norela, a community council former member and a member of the local JAC (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*), reversed INCODER’s presumption that phenotypic blackness didn’t

amount to cultural blackness. Children had to learn, she thought, that their blackness was not defined by the colour of their skin. She thought there was something hidden they had to be taught to (re-)discover, not some secret essence or quality, and not even “culture”, but the stories of those who came before, “those who struggled and who died” (*los que lucharon y que murieron*). As a teacher and as the enterprising woman she was, she dreamed of a school where that kind of history could be taught and learnt.

Monte, rozas and zonas francas

Ararca, 2012

We stroll along the main road. Part of it has been paved with asphalt already and stepping on the ink-black, coarse coat of tarmac feels strange. Like other times in which I moved away from the centre of Ararca I am engulfed by a sensation of dislocation. I am there and I am not there. I have crossed into something which is not the village but which somehow contributes to determine its boundaries and its possibilities. This walk and our visit to some of Emilia’s friends, who look after a *finca* here in the island, were meant to give us some relief from the heavy atmosphere of the last days and so, as we move, we shift from silence to casual chatting, both immersed in our problems. Emilia’s concerns—family, money, her children’s future—and mine—an uncertain future, my mother’s worries—brushing each other when Emilia tells me that all this land—that which faces the road through which we cut now, included the streams, the fruit trees, the yucca plants, the cattle, the *monte* turned into ordered and productive *finca* — was once her mother’s land. I mention my mother’s family land on the other side of the ocean, half-bought through my great-grandfather’s migrant work in New York, half-recovered, through a post second world war timid agrarian reformation, from the southern Italian equivalent of *costeño* land aristocracy. I mumble expressions like “memory” or “sentimental value”, realizing that perhaps, in this moment, they make little sense. Emilia simultaneously encircles and waves away the land with her hands. The heirs would be too many, anyway, she says. How are dozens of heirs supposed to share the land? Quarrels and grievances are already destroying many families. Later, we meet Emilia’s friends. The *finca* they look after is green, luscious, huge patches of it shadowed by the foliage of immense trees. The house is still in construction. The *patrones*, a mix of high government officials and TV celebrities, do not know, I am told, what, exactly, they will do with this land. For the moment it is an investment, looked after and made to flourish by an industrious couple of farmers who filled it with noisy ducks and juicy trees. Before going away my attention is caught by a rasping, throaty sound, some kind of raucous, deep purring. The well-shaped orderly *finca* melts into a murky, multiform *monte* as I take in a wild cat’s dotted, vibrant skin, its muffled steps, as it paces back and forth under the palm-thatched kiosk to which it’s confined by a metal chain, its huge watery eyes like two waning black moons. I remember villagers in Barú telling me how the island’s wild animals had been killed a long time ago, their skins transported by boat and sold somewhere else. Emilia’s friends explain that a *celador* (custodian), a man from another region of the country, working in a nearby *finca*, has found the animal and brought it here, that the *patrones* had its front teeth taken out and the appropriate papers made — with money and influence everything is possible — and that they are looking for a female companion. For both they are going to build huge, comfortable cages, like in the zoos, they assure. To my tales of emptied out *montes* they answer with other tales, like that of the little cat’s mother, whose nervous steps the vegetation stifled as she circled around the *finca* on the night her cub was taken and with those of the *dantas* (tapirs) coming to drink from the streams at dawn. As we walk away, and as I write, I recall some elderly villagers’ voices, murmuring that all which once was abundant and now seems to have disappeared “still exists”, somewhere, hidden, secured or

stolen. I feel weighed down by the abstractions, theories and stark dividing lines — now and once, abundance and depletion — that were meant to let me soar over the island, like villagers' *brujas*, where I could look at it from a distance, making out paths of power and of subversion, past wonders and miseries. I ended up, instead, trapped at the edges of the bush. A special kind of magic had drawn a barring line around the receding, but resilient scrubland. Bewitched by the hands which traced one road and obscured or obstructed a myriad of other pathways, I could not understand that not only was I the one who, as, in the village stories of people who were trained to see night wonders, did not have “eyes” to see and ears to hear life’s rustles and twitches, its perpetual shape-shifting, but that I also failed to spot or dramatically underestimated the, inherently multiform, magic of social prevarication.

Rozas and Montes

The *monte* had changed. Or, better: the *monte*, a huge part of it, was “still there” but people’s interactions with it have been dramatically altered in recent years. Traditional productive/economic activities had waned and some have almost disappeared. The *monte*, fenced, increasingly inaccessible and traversed by the new road, had turned into landscape.

The *roza*, carved out of the *monte*, had a fundamental role in black peasant history in the Coast. *Rozas* were hybrid places, both wild and domesticated. They stood and mediated between the bush and the village. *Rozas* epitomized villagers’ skills, their capacity for survival, despite persecution, dispossession or abandonment. They reflected their knowledge of the *monte* and their resourcefulness or resilience vis-à-vis precarious environmental conditions and other adversities. Moving *rozas* from a place to another helped villagers to preserve the integrity of an ecosystem in which farming, on salty terrains, could be difficult. It also meant refusing control, taking advantage of conjunctures, maintaining autonomy. Moving from a plot to another and borrowing or lending land, opposing fencing, meant acknowledging the unity of the island, its “native” inhabitant’s rights to work on it and walk through it. It implied the possibility to change, to adapt, to decide, to take advantage of circumstances and social ties. And it meant autonomy over one’s work. In this sense I feel that *rozas* simultaneously recalled and obliterated memories of bondage, either the officially decreed subjugation of slavery or the forced and protracted subservience to land-owning authorities that often mirrored the former.

Local authorities always complained about villagers’ ways of dealing with the land. A 1879 report written by Cartagena’s Governor for the national Government in Bogotá lamented that people in Barú, Santa Ana, Bocachica, Rocha, Marialabaja, Pasacaballos and San Antonio de la Varcés, all “black” villages and all linked through ancient commercial and kin networks, didn’t care about “fixed properties” and “technical advancement”, that they were “indolent” and that kept on moving from a “plot of land to another”, thus contributing to “deforestation” (Salgado, 2007). As current environmental authorities, regional administrators, in the past, perceived islanders’ relationship with their land and their sociality as disorder, incompetence, and lack of discipline.

Useful *matas* came from the *monte*, plants that could heal, protect, counterbalance other people’s envy and that had to be gathered in special times, spots and quantities. Through the *monte* people went from a village to another. Some were said to use magical skills to jump from a place to another or flash through the vegetation. Many stories recount islanders’ scary encounters while walking back from a party or from a wake that had been held in Santa Ana or while going back to the villages from Bahaire port. And throughout or over the *monte* local and “foreign” women were said to congregate, fly, dance, sing, multiform apparitions popped up and faded and other creatures, which cannot

live if humans do not continue inhabiting and crossing the *monte*, waited in their marshy dwellings.

Children once roamed through hills and *playones*. These childhood memories are treasured and came up during meetings associated with development projects. Villagers' experiences of living within, through and with the *monte* had been curtailed in several ways, as vast extensions of land had been fenced and become off-limit and as the activities and the sociality which were centred on or related to the *monte* were disrupted or gradually disappeared. Massive, technical, administrative and economic changes brought to an end the cyclical smuggling bonanzas. Fishing, which, according to some islanders, had become the islanders' many activity through time, as land got scarcer and scarcer, had already been hindered by great fishing companies (*Los Vikingos*, for instance), oil spillages from the near industrial district of Mamonal (which made the first pages of local newspaper for a day and then mysteriously disappeared from authorities' concerns, people say, as if fishermen's sightings of bloated and floating fish had been apparitions), by the increasing desalinization of the Bay's waters and, in the past, by the widespread use of dynamite. The *Parque Natural Corales del Rosario*, founded in 1977, of which the Islands of Rosario and portions of Barú's territory are part, placed several restrictions on local fishermen's activities. The use of certain kinds of nets and fishing young exemplars of certain species were forbidden and fishing altogether prohibited around certain areas. Fishermen, though, complained that the authorities cared little about the contamination and destruction provoked by companies and that land-owners could easily elude environmental restrictions.

Few families still owned land in Ararca and Barú. And most of those who have kept the land were thinking of selling it when I was there, although some elderly villagers still farmed on "borrowed" land. Señor Nestor had a small coconut *finca*. He had given it to a neighbour so that he could take care of it and give him part of the harvest but had later decided to take it back. He had felt that the young man to whom he had entrusted the land neither knew how to care for it properly nor was interested in proper sharing. He told me several times that despite people coming to see him, talking about or on behalf of prospective buyers, and offering millions (of *pesos*), nobody in his family would sell the land while he was alive. His insistence reminded me of Señora Esperanza's husband, who, to his wife's exhortations to fence some of the land he knew so well, had answered that his children and grandchildren could do it if they wanted but that he never would.

Farming had also been negatively affected by the *Corte de Paricuicua* (further modification of the Dique Channel) of the 30's which had diminished the quantity of sweet water available for agriculture. The shrimp farms operating, in the past and currently, in some parts of the island had created further water problems. The *poroca*, a plague which came in the 60s, had destroyed coconut plantations, which as most export-grown monocrops are highly susceptible to plagues, and driven some of the traditional families to sell their land and move to Cartagena.

Other families had later sold for different reasons. Development projects made land prices levitate. In Barú, in Bocachica and in Tierrabomba there were many tales about the fortunes and the misfortunes of people who sold all their land. The lucky and witty ones sold, divided the money and bought houses or small buses in Cartagena. Many, nevertheless, people said, squandered the money with partying, alcohol, women, and various other "*lujos*" (opulence, superfluous things), then came back poor and begging for a place to live. Some were confronted with poverty and violence in the poor neighbourhoods of a city they had pined for but in which they didn't know how to survive. And, still, others were said to have fallen victims of a curse, as some of the persons who sold the lands surrounding Playa Blanca, on which the Decameron stands,

who died suddenly, without any apparent reason or in strange ways. A friend's relative, for instance, after selling his land, had decided to get a new set of golden teeth but the dentist's anaesthesia had proved fatal for him.

Furthermore land had multiplied conflicts, set against each other members of the same family, neighbours, and distinct villages' inhabitants. Neither land conflict nor a certain local social stratification based on land property was new to the island. Some families had owned *cocoteras*, coconut plantations, in the past. Cartagena's historical archive contains several documents in which villagers declare that they are exploiting a plot of land (*fomento de una cocotera*). In fact, in different historical moments state authorities made the expedition of private land titles dependant on the market-oriented exploitation of a family plot. Land-owning families were considered wealthier. They often had houses at the centre of the village and, saw those who lived by the water-streams as lower status villagers. Fishermen were not considered suitable matches for these families' girls and they were not invited, as most people from the Playón or the Coco neighbourhood, to the house parties (*fiestas de salón*) that wealthier families organized. Nevertheless the village had internal mechanisms of *patronazgo* and of god-parenthood which allowed some people to grow under the shadow of more powerful individuals. This was the way in which Señor Julio talked about his life. He was poor but his father had been *celador* for the De la Rosa, one of those old families that villagers called "*los de la penca ancha*" (an expression defining, in the *Costa*, "rich", influent families). The male members of this family had built a house for him and Julio had grown up among them.

Talking about the land was hard. It was, perhaps, the hardest thing to ask about, after *brujería*-related issues. When I started walking on the streets of Ararca rumours whispered that I was there for the land. What else could I do, strolling around in sandals and sunglasses, looking at the houses and at the patches of *monte* encrusted in between, under the inclement sun? It was evident that I was "measuring" (*midiendo*) the village, contemplating business possibilities...And stories about land grabbing and land transactions were always murky. They always sounded like rumours. Some said that people had been killed by relatives, through sorcery, for not agreeing to sell their portions of land.

The land and social change

I gradually came to realize that gender ideology was an essential factor to take into consideration when dealing with protracted land-based conflicts. In Ararca, Señora Paulina had to cope with the pretensions of various male relatives, who claimed for themselves the land that her mother had left her. Her uncle, first, and her nephews, years later, had tried to occupy or sell her land. She had reached an agreement with the first but the second had falsified her signature while she was at the hospital in Cartagena and she had gone to Court. Since, as a friend of mine used to say, female surnames "got lost" in most cases when property was formalized through deeds—most of them being stipulated by male members of the family—female rights and, for the researcher, gender issues, became invisible and have to be inferred by paying attention to extended families' conflicts. Men often claimed land property over female family members because they were those who usually worked on the *rozas* or because they maintained that a male relative had preferred or chosen them as heirs instead of other relatives, despite the existence of deeds supporting other arrangements or of similar claims on the female side of the family.

These contentions cannot be understood without delving into the history of the progressive invisibilization of female farming labour. In Ararca, Emilia remembered that when she was very young her mother Paulina used to work on the *rozas* while her father

went fishing. Her mother's sister worked all her life in the *monte* and she was famous for her *rozas*. Similarly, Esperanza's mother, Flora, had learnt to make *rozas* and ranchos when she was a child and she had "opened up", cleared, cultivated and sold rice in Cartagena's El Pozón when this was still *monte* and marshland. It could be that Ararqueros, most of them (or their parents) coming from an *estancia* (Polonia) were all used to farming or that female farming could have been common in the past, even in Barú. It was still common for women, anyway, especially for elderly women, to have vegetable patches, small orchards and useful plants near their houses or in their back-garden and in Barú I was told that in the past some women had an extensive botanical knowledge.

Even official records from as early as the XVII century showed that black women owned rural property in Cartagena's region (Wheat, 2009). As in other colonial settings the state did its best to promote the idea of the desirability and of the appropriateness of male private land property. During the 1774-1779 "resettlement" campaigns —whatever gendered land arrangements might have existed in seventeenth century *sitios* and eighteenth century *rochelas* —the authorities, represented by the *capitán poblador* De la Torre y Miranda—distributed plots of land from the *ejidos* (communal land, pertaining to the Crown) to male adults, as "heads of the family" (Lucena Giraldo, 1993). Resettlement campaigns aimed to concentrate labour forces, enhance productivity, extend great estates and control peripheral territory by civilizing its inhabitants. Civilizing people who seemed content to live "like *Caribes*" and "under a tree", as if they were in a "palace", and where men cared little, a horrified Antonio de la Torre y Miranda wrote, about their female kin's promiscuous behaviour (*ibid.*, 1993), meant simultaneously promoting the ideology of male control over female kin and of male property. It also meant that some men could be co-opted by choosing them as representatives of their social groups vis-à-vis colonial authorities.

Current land-based conflicts are also exasperated by the lack of formal documentation, as in most cases deeds were in the past replaced by verbal agreements, and by the fact that in some cases a multitude of individuals claim to descend from the person whose name was registered in legal land documents. In contexts where one of the tenets of successful masculine performance was the abundance of offspring and where men had children with several women and in different places, this abundance of potential heirs, each basing their claims on particular affective, social or biological relations with the original "owner", has caused several family and community controversies. Moreover, we should reflect on the value of "selling", on the meaning of "sales", in times in which many islanders, most of them illiterate, didn't have information about the monetary value or economic perspective of their territory and weren't accustomed to handing large sums of money or to translate the complex relationship they had with their territory into a precise figure.

In other cases and in more recent times, some individuals sought to sell land that belonged to other persons or plots which couldn't be exploited without having free access to adjacent land. It also should be noted that the Islanders' tendency to establish close relationships with local and, later, national elites, has proved a double-edge weapon. As in other historical moments and geographical contexts (a paradigmatic example is that of the English commoners studied by Thompson) many among the people who would be dispossessed of their communal rights over the land had a history of "collaboration"—made of mutual obligations and strategic alliances, often sanctioned by the requirements of fictitious kinship —with individuals and families who would seize vast extensions of land.

During my fieldwork, economic and territorial changes were met with different reactions. In Barú and in Ararca people had different ideas about what was more convenient for their communities. They held various ideas of “community” and “development” and contradictory feelings towards them. Some felt that selling their land and going to Cartagena meant having a “good life” and some Ararqueros were enthusiasts of becoming a “small Cartagena”, thus getting rid of the stigma of backwardness, misery and abandonment by becoming part of the city. Many villagers imagined or hoped they would have education, jobs, health facilities, more diversion. What some craved others feared: villagers would be spoiled, youngsters would care even less about their territory, criminals and thieves would come from the City and above all prospective workers would come from Cartagena and, since they were accustomed to urban *rebusque*, they would get jobs which islanders weren’t enterprising enough to do.

With tourism new waves of people had reached the island. Some, despite their fleeting passage, had left memories. Night roaming bikers allegedly hunting down drug-addicts and other deviant individuals had terrorized villagers some years before my fieldwork. Some had been shot and killed. As in other Colombian contexts these apparitions had been accompanied by the materialization of lists of people who should leave the village if they cared for their lives. At the end of my fieldwork two *celadores* had been killed in a short space of time in *fincas* near Barú in a short time, supposedly for drugs-related issues. It was said that one of the victims had been beheaded. People also said that black four-wheel-drive trucks had been seen in the night, carrying strange people who wanted to question Baruleros. *Mohanes* (ghostly creatures, see chapter on *Brujería*) had left the marshes in which they had so far waited for children to catch and turn into other sad *mohanes* and come to the new road, where they had caused tragic accidents.

Then there were other concerns. Some people, especially those who still owned land or those who understood better Colombian administrative, legal and fiscal framework, feared that the *Impuesto Predial* (tax on rural property), which had increased of 300% in 2010 (Sarmiento Anzola, 2010) would continue to spiral with future infrastructure work and the Government would finally have legal means to evict the islanders. While some Community Council activists, mainly based in Barú, had started thinking about ways to organize themselves in order to obtain a collective title over their territory, other people were frightened at the prospect of holding something in common with their fellow villagers, in a social milieu where swindling, violence and land-grabbing have caused mistrust and uncertainty to flourish for decades.

In Ararca, site of a great experiment towards the “eradication of extreme poverty”, managed by a creative ensemble of state institutions and corporations, not everybody rejoiced over *Puerto Bahía*’s project of place- and community-making. Some whispered that it had been decided, proclaims about the rebirth of Ararca notwithstanding, that the whole village, had to be moved somewhere else, in order to make space for the new development projects. Other islanders, moreover, had a different idea of progress. They believed that people had to find a way to preserve Barú’s quality of life, its *monte*, its safety. For them what mattered was continuing to live in a place where people had known each other for generations, a place which was not Cartagena, with its problems, conflicts, violence and strident misery. Ruby, for instance, thought that progress was a fallacious concept. People were apparently “moving forward” but had lost things on the road, forgetting, failing to recognize obvious connections and to learn from history.

The mega-proyectos

The incorporation of a people’s territory into a renovated capitalist map and into national institutions can only work through a concomitant production of specific

subjectivities. The “free zone” is a fitting legal and territorial framework for the interplay of neoliberal ideology and historical national imagery. The “free zone” is also an epistemological framework, an example of “coloniality of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2002), as the dominant project of place and the special regime it imposes on colonized eco-social systems is accompanied by a blend of Eurocentric presumptions on the optimal ways of governing and regulating space and populations, and framed within a macro-narrative of progress, civilization and epistemological prominence of technocratic discourses. The rhetoric of trade without frontier and of market competitiveness and prosperity of which development projects are imbued in the Bay of Cartagena is also permeated by older images and discourses, from nationalist tropes to a gendered language of domination and compliance. It’s tempting to draw a comparison between the ideas of “freedom” the “free zone” project postulates and the idea of freedom which the black inhabitants of Cartagena’s Bay searched for, imagined and devised in their historical project of place-making.

Aiwha Ong (2006) argued that the neo-liberal ideas on which “free zones” are premised represent the most recent development of bio-politics. According to Ong in the places which are slowly been targeted for the introduction of market based calculations and projects, neoliberalism works through the framework of the “exception”. The “free zone” exceptionally concentrates on a specific space people, infra-structures and special legal arrangements. Various “techniques of subjection” (*ibid.*) are deployed by the state in order to force people to comply with the requirements of the Free Zone. In the case of Barú Island, the physical attacks (or the threats) on individuals who supported islanders’ land claims, the exceptional cost of life, an unequal circulation of relevant information and knowledge, various legal provisions and the restrictions of islanders’ movements can be considered efficacious means for hindering the emergence of alternative projects of place-making and, in the long term, for a people’s dispossession. Some villagers remembered that the appropriation of black people’s eco-social milieus by corporative and elites’ interests had already taken place several times in Cartagena. It had happened in Pekín, Boquetillo, Pueblo Nuevo, Chambacú. It was, during my fieldwork, happening in Gestemaní and in other slums that for their location constituted exceptional business opportunities (for instance the *Barrios* of the Popa Hill slopes).

But other individuals failed to notice or to pay attention to past occurrences. Current hegemonic powers also work by shaping neoliberal or “modern” subjectivities. Ong engages with a Foucauldian idea of power when she links capital encroachment over a territory with the application of specific sets of “technologies of subjectivity”, practices aiming to inscribe onto citizens dispositions, cognitive orientations, worldviews and ideas about the self^{xxiii}. It wasn’t difficult to notice the impression that a flock of city social workers —each on with their logo imprinted on well-kept t-shirts, with their being almost like “us”, with their quasi-evangelical discourses about hard-work rewarded by a promising future—could make on villagers for whom the usual interaction with institutional actors has been constituted by neglect and stigmatization. The multitude of organizations which implemented programs in the island circulated ideas and practices which evoked modern, more appropriate, efficient ways of living.

The organizations which ran social programs in the Island promoted new ways of looking at local forms of relatedness. The extended networks of kinship relationships of the villages, when recorded through NGOs tools, turned into a series of snapshots of nuclear families which re-assembled Ararca into something I could recognize with difficulty. Visiting couples were made to occupy the same box, children living in Bogotá didn’t exist anymore, matriarch like Señora Paulina, who was the centre of sets of centrifugal and centripetal practices turned into a dependant “elderly adult” (*adulto mayor*), a man’s

various wives split up into an official nuclear family and various mother-centred ones and scores of nephews, nieces and cousins in compliance with social workers' grids became solitary monoliths.

During my fieldwork the *Consortio Vial* which was building the road brought Ararca's children and their mothers to the elegant shopping mall Caribe Plaza in Cartagena and, after lunch and some time spent with video-games, imparted them a lesson on the dangers and the inappropriateness of begging for money on the road (one of the most common activities for children in Ararca, until recent times, granting them a certain freedom and often allowing them to help their family). While I am writing the foundation's Facebook group publishes pictures of the romantic dinners which marked the end of the courses during which "experts" taught *araquero* couples how to solve their conflicts. Other pictures record the occasions in which pregnant women were taught by other experts how to "emotionally connect" with their unborn babies as well as other essential maternal skills. Programs of "income generation", advocated for a productive use of time and money, taught to see in life, social events and interactions risks that needed to be minimized or occasions for investment and to consider embodied knowledge as an economic asset. Medical check-up campaigns, continuously praised as the most important benefit of various organizations' work, sometimes encouraged the development of a reductive, hyper-technical concept of health where calories-checks or routine pap-smears seemed to eerily erase the reality of the transformation of a village's socio-natural world into an oil company's handling and storage space.

I found that partial compliance, strategic acceptance and an array of tactics deployed in order to take advantage of campaigns and projects, seemed to characterize Ararqueros' responses. Resistance came in varied shapes, although rarely phrased as such. Some social workers puzzled over the unexpected failure of promising programs. The goats that had been distributed among families with the purpose of incentivizing small enterprises and with the recommendation of keeping them within enclosed spaces went crazy, ran wild, got sick and died for want of fresh air, movement and company. Women asked for "lifts" in the buses which were meant for the villagers who attended training courses in Cartagena. Those who had enrolled in specific programs sometimes took the equipment they were given and never showed up again or boycotted collective enterprises to avoid working with women they could not get along with. Other women questioned the alleged professionalization of traditional female care activities (and thus the idea of woman as natural care-provider) by suddenly quitting jobs or programs which required them to "herd" children (*arrear pelados*) as ranch-hands herd cattle. One of the women whose expressive and supposedly radiant (after a donation) faces hung from the wall of Ararca's new House of Culture told me with a facetious smile that "they" were the ones who had made money out of her and not the other way around.

Many of the practices and discourses associated with development and accompanying the implementation of mega-projects also offered new possibilities for Baruleros or Ararqueros. Even in this case Foucault's idea of "resistance" as the "compatriot" of power is useful to reflect on what processes like the *Consulta previa*, limited, biased and influenced by individualistic and group interests as they seem to be, can provide. Conflicts and power struggles pervaded these processes as people have distinct allegiances, different expectations and different values. Rumours about some representatives' "corruption" and greediness are omnipresent. At the same time, activities like the identification of the impacts of certain projects or the negotiations about possible compensations for those impacts that cannot be mitigated were occasions for gathering, reflecting, remembering and narrating. They generated productive events and spaces, memory-making and memory-circulating occasions. Within these contexts people could

reflect on the island's story and on its territory, pointing at relevant landmarks, at its resources. They could think about priorities and needs, about the genesis of current problems, sharing information and strengthening ties with other communities. Consultations were also an occasion for negotiations about the "value" of the island's resources. For the first time islanders could exercise the power of transforming immaterial value and embodied knowledge into monetary value, as *patrones* and other powerful social actors always did. This magical power (negotiating a price for change, loss, memory and identity) gave them some agency but objectified processes into objects and commoditized social relations. Furthermore the possibilities for change and real inclusion were fewer than expected if considering that black communities must be consulted and compensated but do not have the power to stop the implementation of projects even when these are considered harmful for their territories.

Land of plenty, Land of scarcity: remembering, narrating, making place

Within the current, grandiose plans for the neo-liberal shape-shifting of the island of Barú, little space has been reserved for local ways of "being, knowing, doing" (Escobar, 2008); for islander's memories, experiences, histories. Even so, memories and historical experiences do count. Touristic development deals as much with future projects as with the return and reshaping of the past.

Baruleros and Ararqueros' memories and stories made the past available for the arduous task of making sense of new experiences of connection and disconnection. Memories about the island's and the villages' past evoked a place shaped by the tension between scarcity and abundance. Informal economy in the island (*rebusque*), for instance, responded simultaneously to scarcity and abundance of resources, possibilities, outcomes: the island was a place with a variety of opportunities but it was also marked by precariousness and, increasingly, by spatial and social limitations.

Memory-making and memory-circulating practices shaped narratives in which experience—ties, interactions, travels, skills like making family and kin despite misery, violence and fragmentation, "not making enemies", "avoiding problems", knowing about "*lo otro*" (magic, the wondrous, witchcraft), "preserving" (*resguardarse*) your and your kin's bodies-selves, showing "respect", give the appropriate upbringing (*crianza*)—helped to build the island and kept it alive. Against those experiences were judged current events and young people's decisions. They were the ones to whom the island, villages, "community" were entrusted. Many villagers were scared about the, often unconscious, complicity of the young with antagonistic and powerful projects of place-making. Some feared, like Ruby, that the "opportunists", those for whom memories and obligations were infinitely pliable and could accommodate individualistic and corporative projects, would be the only native islanders left in a few years. Other islanders phrased these generational dis-connections in more ambiguous terms. They said that formal education (and thus the Nation) had erased the value of experience, that the lack of proper "respect" threatened to blot out older people's sufferings and adventures or that prayers and other magical and protective skills couldn't be passed down anymore: that a chain, a progression, a course had been halted, broken. Without the young's acknowledgement it was as if the past and its inhabitants, the landmarks which preserved the island's identity, had never existed. Mobilizing memories of historical experiences which express and have preserved alternative values could be a crucial endeavour for Baruleros and Ararqueros in this uncertain historical moment.

ⁱⁱ Could he have referred to runaway slaves who had taken refuge in the Island?

ⁱⁱⁱ “Mythical” in the sense that it is a constant reference, that it has an extraordinary symbolic importance and that might have served as model to interpret subsequent social interaction, not that it isn’t premised, at least partially, on real events.

^{iv} The men laughed at the questions about their identity that Von Humboldt’s companions asked them and answered that they were just “walking” (*paseando*). They pretended to know who they were speaking with and once they made sure they weren’t speaking with the “Spanish” offered to join the crew if they were given clothes.

^v Diego de Peredo, *Noticia...* in Bossa Herazo.

^{vi} The 1851 law established that slaves were to be freed starting from the 1st of January 1852

^{vii} See Bossa Herazo and Fonade, *Sonidos de la Tierra*, Fundación Espinosa, Ministerio de Cultura, Guía cultural/Patrimonial Barulera.

^{viii} Here I follow Dirlik (1999), who uses “grounded-ness” as a key term for a more porous, flexible concept of “place”.

^{ix} See the renowned “*Colombia Amarga*” (Castro Caicedo, 1976) for often dramatic testimonies/tales of migration to Venezuela in the second half of the 20th century.

^x According to Martínez Batista and Florez Benavidez, who did some historical research for their thesis, in 1835 Sebastian de Villanueva had also bought 3 “*caballerias*” (1 *caballeria*[Colombia]= approx. 38.646 hectares²) land on which Santa Ana had been founded from Manuel Joaquín de Paz, manager of the *Obra Pia de la Caridad de Nuestro señor Jesucristo*. In 1835 he owned thus huge extensions of land in the Island.

^{xi} See <http://www.banrepcultural.org/node/123394>

^{xii} Who was Mr B.? I have lost sleep over his identity. I have reached a stage in which I can set up a hypothesis. From the bits of past which the Web now records, I discovered that a Mr H. **Bentley** was among the founders(1933) of the prestigious Cartagena’s *Club Campestre*. A Henry or Harry Bentley pops up from the virtual shreds of Colombian business and social life from the 1920s to the 1960s. In 1927 he was, in the burgeoning City of Andean (which was building the oil pipeline Caño Limon Barrancabermeja) and TropOil (filial of Imperial Oil Co, which depended on New Jersey-based company Standard Oil) the director of the Royal Bank of Canada (there were links, which I cannot explore for lack of space between RBC and Andean, through Standard Oil). In 1926 he figured as a member of the newly established *Banco de la Republica*’s (which had connections with the RBC) board of trustees. Mr B. was also in the directive board of Cartagena’s commercial Chamber at the end of the 20s. In 1939 Bentley was listed as administrator of the *Compañía Colombiana de Maderas* and in 1944 he had occupied the position of ad honorary vice-consul of the British Consulate in Cartagena. In 1960 *El Tiempo* recorded that he christened the son of a couple pertaining to the national elite. In short, a Bentley did exist (and I remembered, upon my discoveries, Joan Rappaport writing about “indigenous” historical memories which for lack of contextualization often come to be treated as myths/legends.) He was an influential foreign businessman (and somehow a diplomat) who got involved with and related to local wealthy families and there are intriguing spatial convergences between his commercial interests and those of other individuals-groups who operated in the Island. It would be interesting to know what happened to Polonia in between Manuel Gonzalez Brievea and Mr B.

^{xiii} Argos, now a huge trans-national company, was originally founded in Medellín, Antioquia, at the heart of Colombian business enterprises. It started as a cement producer and exporter and it later diversified its activities. It has investments in cement, real estate, energy, ports. It tried to acquire and maintain a reputation of “eco-

friendly” company. In the Island it is developing colossal touristic projects and it owns *Reforestadora del Caribe* (“reforestation” company), with which it participates in the UN carbon trade schemes and which came into the spotlight, in 2011, when the congressman Cepeda asked Ban Ki Moon, at the time UN secretary general, to expel the company from the UN carbon trade program. Cepeda was a leader of the left-wing *Polo Alternativo* and accused Argos to have links with paramilitary groups who had operated in the Montes de Maria and to have appropriated the land which became available in the region, in the 2000s, after a wave of massacres and displacement. See: <http://colombiareports.co/congressman-demands-un-expel-colombias-argos-from-carbon-trading-scheme/>

^{xiv} Something which some Santaneros kept on saying even at the time of my fieldwork and which caused incensed conversations.

^{xv} As I will show later the physical limits of most *haciendas* were not clearly established. Documents usually mention the total extension in *caballerias*. This lack of definite borders allowed landowners, in various historical moments, to take possession of the areas which surrounded their property and which were occupied by farmers and their *rozas*.

^{xvi} Fencing, construction works, cultivations which had improved the value of the land.

^{xvii} See: *Recuperando lo Nuestro*, Consejo Comunitario de Orika and fundación Surtigas

^{xviii} In the documentary “*La gran estafa*”, available on Youtube, lawyers, islanders and activists enter into the details of the Island’s land-grabs of last decades. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfBBFKMsPE>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZFIJPRkx-g>

^{xix} See also: Guzman, Edwin (2013). *De tour para despojar a las comunidades Afro*.
<http://www.desdeabajo.info/component/k2/item/21889-de-tour-para-despojar-a-las-comunidades-afros.html?tmpl=component&print=1>

^{xx} The ambiguous nature of a society which handles national land of extraordinary market values with an almost symbolic capital is being investigated. See “*Congreso debatira’ entrega de tierras en Barú*”. *El Universal*, 30-08-2012.

^{xxi} See: <http://pacinfra.com/> and , for instance: <http://www.worldfinance.com/markets/energy/capitalising-on-colombias-recent-natural-resource-boom-with-pacific-infrastructure>

^{xxii} <http://www.colombiaenaccion.gov.co/2011/06/07/red-unidos/>

^{xxiii} See also Dardot’s and Laval’s(2013)important work.

CHAPTER 2. Making kin and keeping distance in the interstices: local forms of relatedness, gender and generational conflicts in the Island

Introduction

Islanders, with their activities and their journeys, their interactions and their stories, bridged geographic and socio-cultural distances. Life in the interstices of a relatively vast trans-territory fostered particular relational forms and specific ways of talking about “family”, “community”, masculinity and femininity and appropriate or disruptive forms of sociality.

The openness and flexibility of local kinship system, the importance given to *crianza* (raising children in the appropriate way), to god-parenthood and, more recently, to relationships between members of the same religious congregation, all bypassing strictly biological family ties, are connected with Islanders’ historical experience of creating and maintaining “rooted networks” (Haesbart, 2011) through which distance and familiarity, difference and belonging, hierarchy and reciprocity could be managed according to particular circumstances.

Social liminality –Islanders’ historical being “part of” and “standing apart”– fostered relational and narrative practices in which acceptance of and compliance with hegemonic ideologies mingled with corrosive doubt, ironical destabilization and unruliness.

The stories and the rumours which deal with local relationships (and which are, mainly, stories about friction, about fissures and about the increased fragmentation of local relatedness) are polysemic and polyphonic accounts which attempt to “order” and to make sense of the changes which are investing an “open-ended” (as in Wardle, 2004) and intricate kinship system, of new allegiances, of the shifts in the rules that once regulated the appropriate transactions between men and women, between generations and between different social groups. People’s stories, in the field, were spun by an intricate tapestry of voices. Some tried to make sense of unsettling changes by deploying a discourse about current “disorder” in which the history of hegemonic powers—of their historical attempts to regulate or annihilate marginal subjectivities and peripheral social practices—and that of Afro-Colombian resistance, were often interwoven.

Emilia’s family

I will start with a house. It stood by the main road and at the foot of a rounded hill. It was square, painted in pink, solid. Señor Fermín had built it and building was something he knew well. He had worked for twenty years in Caracas, in the once booming factories of Saudi Venezuela, and had made up on the slopes of Petare^{xxiv} more than one *ranchos* with his own hands. Señor Fermín often sat on the porch, on a white plastic chair, reading his Bible or, later, looking at the muddy or dusty track slowly turning into a tarmac road. I sometimes heard him criticizing Ararqueros for walking around barefoot or in scanty dresses, or for losing time playing domino under the shade of a nearby wooden shack: a bad sight, in his opinion, and a worse welcome for those who arrived to the village. Sometimes he had a feeling, he confessed to me, that Ararqueros

walked in a bizarre way, as if they were about to break into a dance. Couldn't I see the twitch of their limbs; didn't I notice the quiver in their gait, he would ask, still puzzled by his discovery. Yet he thought the *pueblito* was safe and life enjoyable, there, when compared with the perils of Caracas and Cartagena, where he had spent many years of his life.

Señor Fermín was some sort of entrepreneurial King Midas; an expert in *rebusque* (informal economy). Whatever he touched or cast his sight on turned into a possibility of business. When he had got together with Emilia and moved to the village he sowed two trees from his native Mompox, outside the house, so that they could grow and give him the shade that life needs in order to be enjoyed. When the trees grew up, he started thinking that, once the road was built, he would place under the trees some chairs and a table with soft drinks and snacks, and entice the tired and overheated tourists who would surely flock to Playa Blanca by the time the road was completed. At the time when I began living with Fermín and Emilia the former was still baking his sweet, soft-sponged coconut breads at dawn and Emilia would don her immaculate white apron, an incredible sight in Cartagena and even more so in Ararca, and then she would walk the main road and the little alleys of the village to sell them. Fermín stayed in the house and attended to people who wanted to buy the ice he had also decided to sell after investing in a fridge and the ice-cream and juices that Emilia prepared overnight.

Emilia and Fermín met in Cartagena. She was much younger than him. Señora Paulina, Emilia's mother, sent some of her daughters to live in the city with their godmothers when they were very young. Emilia grew up in Cartagena but she always saw Ararca as "home" and visited the village whenever she could. Emilia knew the peripheral *barrios* of the city when these were still *monte*. She would talk of the giant snakes which would come rolling down with streams of water during the rainy season and of the immense trees that grew where houses and roads had been built. She was given a machete to clear (*limpiar*) the *monte* which covered Cartagena when she was still a little girl. Later she got married with a man from the city, who was an inveterate gambler. She had two kids, Diego and Jenny, and when the first was still a boy she separated from her husband, who kept on undermining all the efforts she made at saving money through her work as a maid for hotels and wealthy households. Although she had broken up with her children's father she continued to visit her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. She always emphasized that they had helped and supported her in many occasions.

Fermín had been one of Emilia's neighbors in Cartagena. He had come back from Caracas some years before and he was a widower, with grown children and grandchildren, who lived in Caracas and in Cartagena. He was also a convinced Baptist, a faith that he had picked up from his late wife. When Fermín proposed to Emilia, Jenny and Diego already knew him well. Little Jenny would call him *abuelo* (grandpa) and play all day with his grandchildren. Fermín had a small pension, which was more useful in a tiny village than in Cartagena. For his pension, (and for being whiter than most Ararqueros), he was often believed to be wealthier than he was. Some people resented what they saw as stinginess and the contempt they thought he could show towards other villagers. He, for his part, could be harsh with what he described as certain people's eagerness to "have it all for free", either by taking advantage of someone else's efforts or by playing the poor villager's role for state authorities and NGOs.

Emilia and Fermín decided to go back to Ararca and try to build a house there. They first lived in a room at a relatives' place. Then Paulina gave her daughter a plot of land near her house, and Fermín slowly fabricated a house. Paulina lived with her daughter Sandra on the main street of Ararca. Sandra was as enterprising as her sister Emilia. She had been involved for a long time in whatever project would come to the

village although by the end of my fieldwork she often said she had grown tired of the organizations' promises. Sandra lived with her daughter Valentina and with her son. During my fieldwork she started living with a village man, who worked at the Decameron Hotel and, later, had another child with him. She had lived and worked in San Andrés Island when she was younger and she used to say that her first son was a *Sanadresano*. Her daughter Valentina would often see her father, who lived in Santa Ana with his family and helped her with some money. With that, Paulina's subsidy, her and her son's occasional work and, later, her partner's income, Sandra supported the household.

There was a constant exchange of goods, information, emotions and labor between Emilia's, Sandra's and other siblings' houses. This was more visible when looking at the way they cooked and consumed their meals or at their sleeping arrangements. Sandra cooked a huge midday meal, the main and sometimes only one of the day, for many persons. She cooked for herself, for her kids, for the girl who had a baby with her son, for the baby himself and sometimes for the girl's mother. When I started my fieldwork her son and her grandson's mother were not living together. By the end of my fieldwork the girl had moved again to Sandra's place with her kid, because Sandra had got pregnant and needed help. Sandra would also cook for her partner's mother and send the meal over to her place, for one of her brothers, although he was married, and for her nephew, who had just come back from Caracas, where one of Sandra's sisters lived. Sometimes, when I was living with Emilia, she would also send the food for me. Emilia would in turn send the food for Señora Paulina. Sandra's brothers would contribute to the household whenever they earned something, their collaboration (*colaborar*) presented as help for their mother. Emilia's "Venezuelan" sister would often send food and items from Caracas, as she worked and received economic assistance from the Venezuelan state. Emilia used to joke about the fact that the Venezuelan president "supported" (*mantener*) her sister as if she were his wife.

Sandra's nephew was living with her during my fieldwork and at some point she also took in a social worker from Barranquilla, who was working with a nursery set up by an organization in Santa Ana, and he paid Sandra a small rent. Sandra herself went to work there, sharing her job with another sister, Elisabeth. The information about the project spread within the family. Leticia, Emilia's nephew, also went to work in the nursery for some time. Leticia and Elisabeth were the ones who introduced me to Emilia the first time I visited the island. They had thought that my presence could be helpful for the family, as I needed a room and thus would pay them a small rent.

When I started my fieldwork Jenny and Diego, Emilia's kids, were living in Bogotá. Diego had gone there, hoping to find work, after he finished his military service, but he wasn't doing well there and his mother constantly worried about him. Jenny had moved after she graduated from high school and was working as a maid, tending to the house and looking after children, for a middle class family. This journey had been made possible thanks to another relative, Jenny's aunt, who had lived in the city for many years and had an expertise in placing girls into relatively wealthy houses. She had helped other nieces to go to the capital and find work. When I went back to the island after Christmas Jenny and Diego had come back to the village. I had met the first in Bogotá and I knew she wanted to go back and start studying with the money she had saved. But Diego's arrival had been a surprise for everybody. And he also had come with a dream, or, some relatives said, an obsession: becoming a policeman. In order to go through the compulsory selection stages he needed at least five million pesos (about 2.500 US dollars), which would serve to pay for medical examinations, for his trips to the selection place and for his initial training.

Diego's arrival provoked a crisis within the households. By the time he got there Emilia was involved with one of the projects set up by *Fundación Puerto Bahía* as a compensation measure for the construction of its massive port facilities near the village. She had to go to Cartagena every morning, with other women from Santa Ana and Ararca, and study tailoring. According to the foundation's plan the women, once graduated, would be helped to set up a cooperative business and could find clients among the businesses which would surely come along with the wave of development projects. Emilia was struggling hard to learn. She would catch the bus every morning and train in the afternoon with some of her "sisters in Christ". She was also trying to complete school, attending an afternoon course for adults. She and Fermín had to stop making and selling bread and this had effects on the household's income. Now came Diego, in need of money. Emilia resorted to the family and to moneylenders. She felt that some of her siblings couldn't help and that others didn't want to, but she continued to receive assistance from Sandra and Paulina. Parts of Jenny's hard-worked savings went to help Diego as well, a thing which the girl resented. Jenny was following a beautician course in one of the many institutions of Cartagena who cater to the exigencies of low-income students. She would need the money to pay the fees and to travel to the city once a week but she felt everything was being pooled to help Diego. Señor Fermín supported her though, to the point that when the relationship between stepfather and stepson deteriorated enough to make Fermín think that he might go away, she told me that she had decided that she would go with her *abuelo*. Fermín loved Jenny as if she had been his daughter and always assured her that she would always get the money to study until he was alive.

In both Barú and Ararca there were people that money could be obtained from, usually shop owners, most of them coming from the department of Antioquia and known as *paisas*. Alternatively, people could recur to the *pagadarios*, who lent money, on behalf of dodgy *patrones* on whose identity one can only speculate. It is easy to recognize them. They come every morning on their motorbikes and they have the bizarre habit of wearing a towel around their necks. They go from house to house to ask for their interests, which must be paid daily. During my fieldwork the interest was about 20% of the lent sum and between 100 and 10.000 pesos had to be given back every day or doubled on the following day. *Paisas* and *cachacos* in general were often considered dangerous and even more so if dealing with money and they were known to forcibly break into people's house in case where debts remained unpaid. Villagers' relationships with them were full of resentment.

When in desperate need of cash people would also resort to the pawn's shop, either in Santa Ana or in Cartagena. This is what Diego often did during this period of the tense relationships with his mother and his stepfather. He thought all family's resources should be pooled in order for him to enter the police. Once he had obtained the post he could help his family, he thought. He was so taken by his purpose that he often told me he often dreamt about the police and that he constantly talked about it. He had had a difficult life in the Capital and had to face racism, precariousness and injustice. He felt he could now have the chance to be "on the other side". He equated being a policeman with deserving and showing "respect", providing guidance and security and had a romantic vision of the kind of family he could have if he only could realize his dream. Emilia, who was said to have a predilection for her son, tried to help him in any possible way but also recognized that Diego's presence had worsened her family's situation. The atmosphere was often tense and Pedro took to sleeping next door, at his uncle's place.

Fermín, who had worked hard from childhood, had had a life full of obstacles and an ethics which Weber could have used for his study on Protestantism and capitalism. He thought instead that the boy should have worked and saved money, like his sister had and

reproached him for showing up when he needed money after years of scanty news about his whereabouts. Fermín had grown up in the house of a conservative (and I refer to both the party and the values associated with it) uncle in conservative Mompox and once he became a Baptist his austerity had increased. At 86 years old he would work whenever he had the chance, claiming that it was work which kept him young and fit, and he had the habit of criticizing any catholic or popular event, like Christmas feasts or *velorios* (wakes traditionally held for nine nights after a death) as occasions for *derroche* (splurge). His life was made of work, prayer, enjoying the shadow and the occasional breeze and simple food, when he could afford it. He didn't understand why Diego couldn't be a watchman in a hotel or in a private mansion.

Señora Paulina supported her grandson up to a certain point, then decided that his mother had done enough. No more money had to be given to him. Diego resorted to his father, who lived near Cartagena with his current "wife" and their children. He was a moto-taxi-driver and didn't have a fixed income but he helped somehow. Part of his monetary contribution came from his partner, a thing that caused some problems when the sum wasn't returned as swiftly as this woman had expected. Emilia, a very religious woman, was so frustrated that she confessed me that she felt the Devil himself had tried to lure her, by insinuating that she could ask Him for the money. Pedro had to go to a nearby city for his final tests and provide a series of items he would need for the training. He felt ashamed to go without all the items in the list. Emilia encouraged him to try anyway and to put his faith in God. The story of how Diego hitchhiked and then walked to Sincelejo, the capital of the nearby department of Sucre, having no money left to take the bus, has become part of Emilia's testimony of faith in front of the congregation. Jenny left the course she was taking. She had said she didn't want to go back to the capital but she then started thinking that she could indeed go back and earn some money, then try to study again. She had had a difficult time with her brother, who, often "spurred on" by other village youngsters, insinuating that Jenny had the habit of staying too much outside her house, would reproach for her spending time *en la calle* ("in the street"). She had also broken up with her boyfriend, a young man that Emilia didn't approve of. Jenny later went back to Bogotá, where she worked looking after children she studied part time to become a beautician. At the beginning of 2015 she was back in Ararca. Emilia, she told me, had left the course she had doted so much on and had gone back to her old work as a housemaid, in Bocagrande, a high-class city neighborhood. Diego's dream, against all expectations, came true. He is now [2015] working as a police-man in Barranquilla. Señor Fermín still lives in Ararca.

Annie's family

Annie lived in Barú with her five kids and her grandchildren. She had converted to Evangelism years before I met her, when her older children were still young, but so far she hadn't succeeded in converting her husband. Annie's household also constitutes an example of how family could be defined and experienced in different ways. She would say, and I would agree, that her family were her children. As an afterthought, she would then add to the lot her husband, who was their father. Her brothers lived in Santa Ana, and her sister in Caracas. Her brothers, though, couldn't help her that much, as they already had their families and their problems. Annie was also engaged in some difficult negotiations with some of them, and especially with the kids her father had had with another woman, for some valuable land they all had inherited.

Her older daughter, Miriam, had been in Bogotá for some years and had left her two kids with Annie. In 2012 she went back to the village for some months. In 2011

Annie was also raising a friend's child, who would call her aunt. The boy's mother, after disappearing for some time, finally picked him up and brought him to Santa Ana on the following year. Annie's husband worked in a *finca*, as a custodian, together with a woman, who was the real *dueña del cuidado* (the real worker, him being some kind of companion she had chosen). Here things got more entangled, for me, because the latter was also Annie's husband "wife". Thus according to some individuals Juliet was a legitimate wife whose existence was being made miserable by another woman's whims, concretized through her magical arts. Conversely, she could also be seen by others as the one standing between two persons who had a strong affection for each other and benefitting from the wage which the "other" shared with her husband. Furthermore, Annie's last daughter, Nicole, had spent a great deal of time with the "other" and there were distinct visions of the ties the child and the "other woman" shared. Some people told me the child had been raised by the "other", who would keep the girl with her, buy her clothes and send her to school. Annie's view made this portrait even more difficult to understand. She acknowledged all the things the "other" had done for her daughter but it was not true, she would vehemently protest, that the woman had raised the girl. She had never moved from her, so she was the girl's real mother, she would declare. When Nicole was younger the "other" had wanted to give the girl her and her father's surname, but Annie had opposed the woman's will. There had been a moment, though, in which the relationship between the two women hadn't been as difficult as it was during my fieldwork. The "other" would visit Annie and both started going to the same church. Annie's eldest daughter had gone to live with the "other's son, and they had had a child.

Things changed again when the older children started growing up and Annie got more involved with the church and when Annie's daughter's young husband (the "other" woman's son) was killed in Venezuela, shortly after he migrated there, hoping to find work. Both Annie and her rival had wanted to give respectability and stability to their relationship by marrying their partner so that the unmarried woman would occupy the position of the "other". Annie, who had five children with Señor Jorge, had obviously more social support for her endeavor in this respect. She finally got married and her husband's "woman", now destined to be the "other" forever—at least according to Annie and to the church rules—got to know about it only once the wedding was performed. Getting married was for Annie not only a way to secure her rights to her husband's support but also her entrance ticket into a Christian community which wouldn't allow her to be baptized if her conjugal situation had not been regularized.

When Annie's daughter migrated to Bogotá, she was able to help with some money and with clothes and other goods she would occasionally send to her mother, with whom she had left her first son and a daughter she had with a married man who had deceived (*engañar*) her. But things were often difficult for the girl in the city and Annie still depended on her husband (and hence on her husband's woman, indirectly, for support.) Jorge would also fish and sell his catches or perform other tasks for the owner of the *finca* he was helping to look after. Another daughter started working in a shop and her partner in another one, thus both contributed to the household income, although not always steadily. Miriam's children's paternal families would occasionally give presents or food to the children. Annie's eldest grandson was of course her enemy's grandson as well and that made the relation between the child and her paternal family more difficult. Señor Jorge would serve as an intermediary, bringing the children from a place to another.

The IPUC (*Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia*), her church, was Annie's family as well. She lived right opposite the church and sometimes I felt this was part of her house too. She would go there to speak with the pastor or his wife, to help them in some activities, to ask for advice. I felt there were few things the pastor and Marleth, his

wife, didn't know about Annie's life and about her children. They helped by providing counsel, information, a space where Annie's trips outside the house wouldn't be criticized and also, occasionally, some economic support. Kelly, one of Annie's daughters, celebrated her fifteenth birthday, an important social event in Colombia, in the church. Many people helped Annie to realize Kelly's dream, either with food, presents, money or organizing activities.

Annie's mother had died in Venezuela and left other children there. Other siblings lived in Santa Ana and she grew up between that village and Cartagena, coming to Barú only when some of her brothers had moved there. She once confessed to me that sometimes she felt so tired of her life that she would think of moving to Santa Ana again and leave the rest of the family behind. Indeed she had done it once, when her fifteen years old daughter was a newborn. Tired of her husband's behavior she was able to find a job as a custodian in Playa Blanca, and she moved there with her children. They all remembered those moments with nostalgia. She also had had a shop for some time. Her eldest children remembered it as the biggest shop in the village and related its ruin to the "other" woman's malicious influence. It is difficult to know how much they attributed the breakdown to the woman's envy and her supposed occult deeds or to their father's using the shops' income and goods for the other woman as well, as these two aspects were, as it often happens, inextricably connected. There was no shortage in the Island of stories about business and family ties destroyed by the conjoint action of sorcery, male vanity and female wits.

Local families

We all are family here. I heard it many times, in Ararca. Decoding this expression, though, was not an easy endeavor. Whenever I asked a person who was "family", I would almost always receive as an answer "my children", sometimes parents or siblings, then husband or wife and, occasionally, an aunt or a grandparent. The woman scuttling along the alley or endlessly waiting for a motorcycle on the edge of the road could be family as well, though. I learnt it through my own mistakes: carefree chattering would sometimes knock down an uncle or bump into a cousin. The recurrence of most surnames in Ararca suggested affinity and consanguinity but also made it hard to discern distinct ties. For Ararqueros the whole village (and not only the village) was more or less a vast reservoir of relatedness that could be harnessed or downplayed in different occasions. Some connections would be highlighted and, at least with me, others rarely unearthed. It took me months to discover that despised neighbors who were rarely addressed were also cousins or nephews and nieces. Most of Emilia's neighbors, for instance, were related to her through affinity. I should have realized it from the start but the edgy interactions between my "foster" family and some of them had prevented me from thinking about this possibility. People defined their families in different ways and their definitions could be contingent and strategic, especially outside the field of interaction of close kin. Belonging to a family could be stressed or dismissed in particular circumstances and acknowledgement or dismissal produced strong feelings and fostered open protests or stealthy resentment.

Family revealed itself as something different from a group of people living in the same household or related through affinity or consanguinity, as the people living in the same household could or could not be biologically related, as non-related individuals could turn into fictitious kinship and in some cases non-human figures, like Jesus or some Saints could come to be cherished as loving family members. People could describe their

families in different ways and in distinct moments, tuning in with precise audiences and exploiting global and local family narratives and ideas about relatedness.

The Anthropology of the Anglophone Caribbean produced theoretical concepts which have influenced for decades researchers studying Caribbean contexts. Raymond Smith's (2013) notion of *matrifocality*, defining women's centrality within the household, has been taken up and/or criticized by a host of studies. The notion of the *matrifocal* family is useful to capture and reflect on certain characteristics of (not exclusively) Caribbean social milieus but it has been criticized for hindering complex understanding of the social contexts to which it was applied. Some researchers have argued that it was shaped by ethnocentric and male-centered visions of appropriate and dysfunctional family dynamics and that it was inextricably connected with colonial and state policies which sought to devise corrective incentives (Blackwood, 2006; Barrow, 1996).

Some researchers of the Caribbean world had previously questioned the heuristic validity of a notion which was reputed to have been produced by an artificial delimitation of analysis (M.G. Smith, 1974). Others argued that the studies which had proposed *matrifocality* as the principal characteristic of kinship structure in the Caribbean hadn't paid enough attention to the wider social context contexts, often marked by female economic and symbolic dependence and lack of female decisional power (Momsen, 2002; Rowley, 2002). For others, still, focusing on the "missing man" (Blackwood, 2006) resulted in a reiteration of the ideology of nuclear family and of the idea of the male breadwinner as the "norm" and obfuscated the specificity and originality of local kinships.

More recent re-definitions of *matrifocality*, like González's (1984) one, tried to obviate to these problems by taking into account the dynamic and historical dimensions of kinship and, above all, by looking at concrete historical power relations. González looked at the "multiple, shifting allegiances to different households and families" mothers can build through the years. She emphasized women's agency and their capacity for sustaining potentially supportive relationships through time (see also Helg (2011) for an historical discussion of the same practices in Colonial Cartagena). González gave attention to the "overlapping networks of dyads" (González in Wardle, 2004) into which Caribbean kinship seems to be arranged, thus offering a more dynamic vision of family and community relationships. Judith Gussler (1980) introduced the concept of "adaptive opportunism" in order to describe the same female-led network building processes and Wardle (2004) recently underlined the "open-ended" character of Caribbean kinship, which is (re-)constructed, even in difficult situations, and from early childhood, through personal investment and volition.

"Brothers" and "sisters" in Christ nowadays often shared the space that was once only reserved for godparents. God-parenthood was a classic feature of the Latin American anthropology of kinship. Its relevance for Afro-American families, whose kin structures had been disrupted by the historical experience of slavery and its economic-productive regimes, has been thoroughly noted (Segato, 2007). Señora Esperanza told me, laughing heartily, about the huge number of "godmothers" she had. Her mother had lived in many different places and she had found a godmother for Esperanza in each of them. Although this was seen as a protective measure against misfortune and against the malicious intentions of ambiguous entities, like the *Mohán*, it was also a way of fostering relevant connections, of creating kin in the spaces from and to which villagers traveled, of laying out possibilities for interaction, reciprocity, obligation, mutual support. God-parenthood was still important but it didn't have the relevance it had before. Ana, my landlady in Barú, had sent her three daughters to live and study in the city. They all were living with their aunt and godmother, an energetic woman whose husband had died and who didn't have any children. Other siblings as well would rely on her support to take advantage of

the opportunities the City could offer their children. In this case “sociobiological” kinship was strengthened through god-parenthood, and reinforced through the re-allocation of children within the family.

In the past, it was very common, to choose for one’s children a wealthier godparent that could help them with their studies, with food and clothing (it was once customary, for instance, for godparents, to provide their godchildren with new clothes in December or before patronal festivities), or even take them in for some time. Emilia and her sister Sandra had been sent by their mother to their godmothers’ places when they were very young. They still had resentment towards Paulina for her choice as they thought they had been exploited by their new families, who had been interested in their domestic labor. The elderly woman used to answer her daughters’ criticism by saying that she had only wanted to give them more opportunities. In other cases parents chose their *patrones* as godparents, thus creating supportive alliances that, in some cases, and especially in the past, continued for decades. Such a way of creating or strengthening alliances with more powerful social groups had somehow waned. Recent changes in *costeño* economic/productive activities are partially responsible for these shifts. This shift also needs to be related to the declining power and prestige of traditional rich families in the city and to the ascension of a new class of wealthy individuals for whom the old arrangements do not have the same importance and meaning (Streicker, 1997). Yet wealthy godparents continued to be sought after. Señora Mariela, for instance, an esteemed and spirited Barulera, and a member of one of the most ancient village families, has chosen as a godmother for her foster daughter the wealthy wife of a well-known businessman who was also her *patrón*. During my fieldwork she was hoping this family could help their godchild, who was an excellent student, to get into a good university.

People often mentioned cases in which relatives or neighbors had refused or avoided to help them or in which the help received did not match the receivers’ expectations. Yet, when talking about close relatives, I felt that villagers often left an open space which could be filled with justifications and exemptions. They left an open path for relationships to continue and thrive. Solidarity could be expressed in different ways and through distinct practices. It meant food, guidance, diffusion of essential information, or a place to sleep. It is often said that the *Costa* doesn’t have phenomena like *gaminismo* (street children) as Bogotá and other inner cities. Although this is changing and in Cartagena the sight of homeless children and adults has become more common, in Ararca and in Barú, as far as I know, even the individuals who were considered most troublesome, those whom villagers didn’t refrain from calling *viciosos* (drug-addicts) weren’t denied food or a place to sleep. Various factors prevented villagers from changing too much: the often intricate web of connections and relations that can be tapped for claims and requests of acknowledgement, the relative intimacy of village life, made of many face to face encounters, the idea that safety and harmony must be kept at all cost for the village to remain *sano* (“healthy”, in a moral and physical sense), unlike Cartagena, and the implicit recognition that misfortune could befall any person or family.

Crianza (the process of bringing up children) was said to foster mutual respect and future reciprocity. *Crianza* was often said to be more important than biological ties, especially in the words of adult or elderly villagers. Señora Dira, in Barú, recounted that one of the persons she had loved most in her life, her *abuelo*, used to tell her that although he wasn’t her “real” grandfather and although he was poor, he had handed down to her the *crianza*, and with the *crianza* came the proper way to behave towards the others and, above all, the proper way to teach one’s children how to behave. The right *crianza* mediated between individuals, kin and community. A good *crianza* is the basis for respectful and peaceful living. *Crianza* can preserve or destroy memory. Inappropriate

crianza could drastically change the experience of inhabiting a place. When rules for and, above all, examples of good *crianza* are not “passed on” to the new generations the community and the wider society are doomed to break up and to become unrecognizable for the elderly villagers. Many thought that this was already happening.

There was a constant tension in the villages between getting close or keeping close, and keeping and generating distance. The ambiguity of relationships fostered a game of demanding and denying, of expectations and deceptions. Ideas and perceptions of envy (*envidia*) were intricately tied to these dynamics. For many “envy” pertained to the realm of economic activities. People could be envious of another person’s economic success, of thriving shops, of prosperous business. Envy spurred certain people to copy more fortunate or more enterprising villagers’ business venue, thus threatening to reduce their earnings. Envy was also said to be caused by the resentment towards familiar harmony and reciprocated affect. Good-looking children or teenagers were also said to be the victims of envy. There was an envy of the “unconverted” for those who had Christ on their side. And there was envy towards the skilled ones, no matter how poor they might be. Envy destroyed families, severed ties, made businesses go bankrupt. Even relationships between siblings were susceptible to be poisoned or made ambivalent by the work of envy. Envy was so widespread that it came to be seen as inevitable, a thing which partially excused those who were said to be engulfed by it. Where and whenever a contact is established envy can squeeze itself in the space persons and groups need to fill in order to meet and interact^{xxv}.

Parenthood and Social Reproduction

Motherhood

Among the most unsettling aspects of this curious individual who called herself “anthropologist”, I sensed, people would put the fact that I was married but didn’t live with my husband and that I didn’t have any children. People, either in the villages or in Cartagena kept on asking why. Children were a woman’s “family”. “*Los hijos son la familia de una*”, I would hear over and over. Some people volunteered to tell me that I was naïve. Having a child meant having more rights over a man’s economical “collaboration”. When I saw my partner again, they predicted, he would have children already and he would be with another woman. Men come and go, in a woman’s life, I was told. “*El padre se abre rapido*” (Fathers easily go away), it was said. Children remain. They are company, promise of sustenance. They are needed in order for women to “move on” and, then, ideally, to rest, as they can take care of their mothers when they are able to work. Some people said that they were like a “fruit” and that a fruit must be borne and left on this earth to signal one’s existence.

The centrality given to the relationships between mothers and children did not mean that conflicts did not arise between them. Miriam and Jenny, Annie’s and Emilia’s daughters, despite assuring that their mothers were the persons they loved the most, did not always had an easy relationship with them. Miriam told me that her experience in Bogotá had made her different, that she now cared much less about the things that most of her young fellow Baruleros considered important. She felt that her mother struggled to understand her, and especially her refusal to dress up and take care about her physical appearance like she had done before. She also thought that her mother did not approve of her relationship with her last son’s father. Jenny, who had a boyfriend her mother didn’t like much either—she thought he had been unfaithful to her daughter and that he would make her unhappy—and sometimes dreamed to go and live with him, could not understand

her mother's reaction and her disapproval or why she wanted her to get married before living with a man, if her own marriage had not spared her the task of raising two children almost on her own. What Emilia saw as a desire to see her daughter improve (*progresar*) her daughter saw as an unprogressive, conservative mentality.

Grandmothers were often those who raised children, either together with mothers or on their own. So strong was the attachment towards grandmothers that they were in many cases called "*Mama*" by their grandchildren. Paulina, Emilia's mother, was her niece's confidant. The girl said that the elderly lady gave her good advices and understood her feelings. In Ararca almost all siblings contributed to Paulina's household, who in turn shared her pension with her daughter and grandchildren. In Barú, señora Emilia, my landlady's mother, received help by all her kids and by some of her nephews whenever she had to travel to Cartagena, where she usually stayed at a daughter's place. If respect for elderly members of the family was still shown through sharing of food and care, other, usually younger, villagers were said to starve and mistreat their parents and grandparents or to get rid of their needs by sending them to the *comedores* (community canteens, usually set up by governmental or non-governmental organizations) for elderly people that intermittently operated in Barú and Ararca. In some cases this behavior was imputed to the disorderly habits of the young: gambling, alcohol and drugs, partying, activities which took up young people's time and their usually scarce money and prevented them from fulfilling their family obligations. The same things were often said of parents who were thought to be negligent towards their children, and especially of mothers, to whom the dominant gender ideology assigned domestic duties and whose movements could be seen with suspicion and give rise to rumors. In many cases, as Streicker (1993;1995) argued in his study, these preoccupations signaled the rupture or the questioning of traditional age hierarchies. They constituted a reaction towards young people's (and especially women's) increased availability of choice and autonomy. Nevertheless, I witnessed cases of severe neglect of elderly people, usually, but not exclusively, taking place in households already disrupted by drug addiction.

Fatherhood

Various studies (see, for instance, Gutmann, 2006; Connell'2005; Viveros-Vigoya, 2002) have emphasized, in several geographical contexts, the absence of a unitary social model of fatherhood. These researches also underscore that diverse models of masculinity generally coexist in the same social milieus and are often strategically deployed by different men.

Fathering children was an essential component of masculinity in popular Cartagena. Having a numerous progeny is associated with virility and sexual potency. Sixty years old Lácides was, in Ararca, one of the men who urged me to have children. A mother would do everything for her children, he would say, any kind of work, he insisted, as a way of dismissing my justifications, usually revolving around economic issues. At the same time he didn't produce much more than a (proud, I thought) smile when he told me about the sons he had in the Urabá region, where he had spent some time in the past. He didn't know their names, neither had he known if they were still alive, but it didn't seem to matter. He was their father.

Señor Fermín's , in Emilia's family, had been a caring stepfather, but he was an old man, raised in a region and in a family with different values and habits, and he was really more an *abuelo*, as his stepchildren called him, than a father and tales and memories about *abuelitos* always portrayed these as caring, loving, wise individuals. Emilia's ex-husband, though, hadn't been a loving father. Diego had asked him for help when he needed money for his training, but he had to be insistently "pushed" to do it by

his mother. He had strong negative sentiments about his father, who had abandoned his wife and his children and never asked about their conditions and whereabouts. His dream of being a policeman was also a desire for a different kind of family and was connected to yearnings for respectful stable, fatherhood. Diego often told me that his experience in Bogotá had taught him “respect” and made him responsible. He had suffered and he wanted now to be the one who helped and gave good advice. When he sketched the future he would like for himself he seemed to identify with the ideal characteristics of the *cumplidor* (Viveros Vigoya, 2002), the hard-working, knowledgeable man who does not let down his family. Wilmer, in Barú, was a different case and it showed that different models of fatherhood and masculinity existed and that they were often associated with different educational and economic opportunities. He embodied another kind of sensibility (and masculinity), closer to the urban “middle class” one. He often talked of his family in terms of a “team” where mutual collaboration constructed economic and sentimental stability.

A father’s help generally depended on the stability of his relationship with a woman. And what a woman could demand (*pedir*) from a man often depended on her having children with him. Motherhood tends to be seen as an essential component of femininity, something which produces strong emotions, influences and attachments, satisfactorily but also mercilessly marking a woman’s entire life. Fatherhood, I felt, was often a gathering of opportunities (for recognition, for self-fulfillment, for entitlement to support) that could or could not be cultivated. This was particularly visible in the case of men who had travelled extensively. Many had children in other parts of the country, or elsewhere, for instance in Venezuela or Panama. Although in some cases there were few relationships between these fathers and their children men mentioned them. They were there, somewhere, and constituted a reminder of a man’s experience, of his travels, his life, and his capacity for fostering relationships with women. In some cases, people argued, some of these children would go and look for their fathers, when they reached adulthood. In other cases, though, and increasingly, men’s selfishness and their *sinvergüenza* (shamelessness) were punished in the ingenious ways divine forces alone could muster or by the subsequent neglect (towards elderly fathers) of previously neglected children.

During my research I often noticed differences between young and older fathers. Young fathers tended to be, after the initial enthusiasm, easily disturbed by the commitments required from them. They often lacked the resources to support their kids and had to be substituted by their own parents. Nevertheless, there were exceptions and, above all, there were often profound differences between practice and ideology, or between being a father “in practice” and narrating fatherhood. Men could feel they were doing what they could to support their children while these could have very different ideas, for instance. Relationships between fathers and kids who did not live in the same house could be tense in one period, improve and then return to apparent indifference.

In the case in which a father and his children lived in the same village but not in the same houses, relationships could be extremely different and go from total indifference to occasional sharing of activities, from a last-minute help in emergency cases to constant “collaboration” (*colaborar*). Some fathers could boast about the ability to help their children in difficult situation—help being almost always framed in monetary terms—while children could feel their fathers’ involvement as fleeting and weak. Conflicts could arise and resentment build up from an early age, although I did not feel that it was generally expressed directly. My friend Karen went to sleep at her father’s place when she was in Ararca but she didn’t have an easy relationship with this man, neither did she express a benevolent opinion of him. Another friend, Martín, similarly, had harsh words for a father

who knew he had a child *en al calle* (outside his household) as it was often said of the children born from occasional relationships, but had never cared to know if he was well or he was starving. I came to realize with time, that resentment against what is considered typical male behavior, epitomized by this “indifference” towards offspring, although often dismissed with a few words, with the recourse to the common, taken for granted, self-explanatory male *sinverguenzura*, was a strong occult presence in villagers’ lives, in their stories and memories.

Step-parents

According to Virginia Gutierrez (1987), whose main researches were published in the 1960s and in the 1970s, *padrastrismo* (the common presence of stepfathers) was a characteristic of *costeño* kinship models. *Padrastrismo* offered economic and emotional sustenance but also created family conflicts and was sometimes associated with the abuse of young girls. I heard of such cases but I also heard about affectionate relationships between children and stepfathers. I found several accounts of caring, loving stepmothers. Karen, for instance, had been raised, for some time, by her father’s partner and she only had affectionate words for this woman. She had stood for Karen whenever her father and mother wouldn’t care and had taught her to read and write. Karen maintained a close and loving relationship with her. When people reflected on their lives and on the difficulties they went through they would often point at someone, a step-parent, an aunt, a sister in law, as the person who made the difference, who helped, who shared, who taught, who cared for: a caring adult that often bypassed biological idioms of kinship.

Sally Gordon (1987), who did research in Antigua, used the expression “child shifting” to refer to the practice —which she sees as a characteristic of Caribbean kinship — of allocating children to different households, thus creating and fostering relationships within extended families and bringing some relief to strained households. Likewise, I felt, the common practice of child-fostering reinforced the values attributed to motherhood while simultaneously loosening its biological connotations. Norela and Mariela, two energetic barulero community leaders, were both raising daughters they had “adopted”. The first one was raising a daughter her husband had had by another woman. She didn’t have any children and had proposed that his husband should bring his younger daughter to the village. She had also raised a niece when she was much younger and still single and considered both these girls her daughters. Mariela had been asked to raise her stepdaughter by the dying mother of the child, who had been a friend of her. Women who did not have children were often entrusted one by their siblings or by other relatives. These informal adoptions were the ways in which multiple ends were met: alleviating numerous family burdens, strengthening certain relationships, providing more opportunities for a child and fulfilling the idea that a woman must grow into a mother by growing children in order to have a meaningful life. I myself was asked to bring a child with me to Europe or to eventually leave mine, if I ever had one, to be raised in the island.

Those who did not have numerous families, whose relationships with their relatives were strained, or who lived far away from the place where their relatives lived, like my neighbor Nina and her partner, could be excluded from these networks. When Nina had resorted to the official path and had “turned in the documents” for adoption she’d been told she didn’t possess the requisites to continue with the process: she and her husband didn’t have formal jobs and they didn’t own a house. Despite her usually taciturn demeanor Nina couldn’t help chewing over the reasons of the State’s refusal. She compared her situation—a small but comfortable rented house, that she also used, as many women did or aspire to do, to sell small items like snacks or soft drinks, her husband’s work as an assistant to a local man who ran a transportation service to Cartagena—with

the often cramped, precarious houses of many urban neighborhoods, which, despite insecurity and vulnerability, swarmed with children.

Whenever I asked a woman whose children had been raised by other persons if she had suffered for such an arrangement, they usually answered that it had been for their children's good. But in some stories, people's reactions and the motives which had preceded a child's move from a house into another weren't so clear and could suggest different motivations. Some people rumored that my neighbor's Pilar's older child had been brought up by her father's wife, because the man's family thought Pilar didn't have the skills for raising her properly. The girl rarely visited her young mother and I sometimes had the feeling that Pilar was mortified by her daughter's behavior when, for instance, she walked by her house but didn't stop or greet her mother. In other cases I heard of children taken away by a husband or by other relatives. I came to sense behind the apparent acceptance of a certain arrangements, justified through the language of female sacrifice for her children's good, and in spite of the alleviation that for some women having fewer children to tend to can represent, that power struggles were being waged around children and their *crianza*. Perhaps in some cases a woman was supposed to accept that her children be taken away and was not supposed to show her grief while in others a father's support could only be guaranteed through relinquishing the child to the man's current partner.

Loving relationships between foster-parents and foster-children were not, unfortunately, always the norm and it was common to hear horrifying stories, especially from women who were at least in their forties or fifties, about childhoods spent with uncaring or abusing relatives, with exploitative godparents or, in some cases, with other adults who were supposed to take care of them in exchange for domestic labor. The stories I heard usually had the city, Cartagena, as a background, or, more rarely, another village, as in Annie's case, who had been raised between Cartagena and the village of Santa Ana.

Annie often talked about her childhood. She would still associate the migraines she suffered from beatings she had been given as a young girl in her aunt's house. She thought that her cousin (who had had to give up her studies, Annie admitted, to care for the abandoned children of her aunt, Annie and her brothers) had taken revenge on her, who was only a small child. Annie herself, despite her story and her difficult economic situation, her small house, crammed with running, screaming, crying children had taken in another one in order to help a friend. She had also had another young girl in her house years before and I was there when, during the Holy Week, when such visits are paid and exchanged, she went back to the village with her husband and her child and shared again Annie's house and meals.

***Quitar maridos* and other gender performances: “glocal” masculinities and femininities**

Female “serial monogamy”

According to Virginia Gutierrez' (1987) famed studies of regional differences in Colombian kinship models “serial monogamy” was the typical relational pattern for women in the *Costa*. Women would, according to this model, usually get involved in subsequent and monogamous heterosexual relationships. Likewise, and more recently, Joel Streicker (1993;1995), showed that, at least in the popular neighborhood of Cartagena he studied, serial monogamy was still considered the norm for women. While female infraction to the norms was stigmatized and subversive behavior controlled

through rumors and accusations of witchcraft, male entitlement to multiple relationships was acknowledged by both men and women, although, expectedly, in different ways and with distinct intensity.

When women talked about their lives and about their past relationships with men they often used the term *fracaso* (failure). Adult women, and especially more elderly ones, recounted and counted their *fracasos*. I did not feel as if their words expressed sense of guilt or regret. *Fracasos*, it seemed, were to be expected in a woman's life, as male proclivity to move on (*abrirse*). Nevertheless *fracasos* demonstrated that women still bore the responsibility of marital success, of which "putting up with things" (*aguantar*) had been considered the prevalent constituent, at least according to the women who had decided not to endure anymore.

A stable conjugal union was considered the ideal, as ideal and desired was marriage (instead of common law unions)^{xxvi} for Emilia or Annie. Intentions to marry were supposed to indicate a boy's seriousness (*seriedad*) and marriage thought to bind men more tightly to their spouses and children (despite controversial evidence). Leticia, Emilia's niece, an educated, young woman who had been involved in the process of constitution of Black Community Councils, had been single until, for village standards, a relatively late age and had to withstand the criticism of some of her fellow villagers. She then decided to get engaged with a man who had been a friend of her for a long time. He didn't have her education or her experience with social organization and I sensed that sometimes she felt obliged to explain that she had chosen him because he was an honest person and this was a rare quality, as she told me. She had wanted the man to prove his seriousness by marrying her and the wedding had taken place in Cartagena. She was one of few women I knew, either in Barú or in Ararca, who had got married. She had an *esposo*, people corrected me when, convinced I was using a synonym, I would refer to him as her *marido* ("common law" husband, or wife, in the Anglophone Caribbean). Both terms are translated with "husband" in English but only *esposo* is used for formal unions. Some villagers had tried to warn Leticia's future *esposo* about the deal he was about to strike. Getting married without first "knowing" each other (*conocerse*) or seeing if "getting along" (*comprenderse*) was possible was considered at least a risky investment, according to male perceptions. The above-mentioned are ambiguous expressions which enclosed a variety of nuances and also referred to female virginity which, despite recent social changes, was still considered desirable. An *esposo* who had known his wife as a *señorita* (a young woman, but also implying virginity) was reputed to care more for her (*valorar*) and to keep his commitment to her and their family. She would always be *la firme* (the "official" one), the *mujer de la casa* ("house mistress"), the *jefa*, the *patrona*.

A girl who was said to "know" men already could be considered (usually by men) as an adult woman. In a village, for instance, a thirteen years old girl had been given as a nickname the name of a voracious animal. Children, and particularly girls, were precocious there, a friend of mine used to say, as a way of replying to my puzzlement. The girl with the bizarre nickname was described as a *barera* (woman who goes to bars, usually considered a male space) and a *jugadora* (gambler) and as eager to engage in sexual relationships with men, perhaps in exchange for money. Men's stories abounded in complaints about scheming, greedy women, constantly devising a way to relieve a man from his money. Sexual and economic motives were difficult to disentangle in these narratives. Greediness and sexual voraciousness seemed mutually constituted. Money or commodities were somehow conceived of as the natural, obvious, payment for sexual activities, whether as a form of occasional "collaboration" (*colaborar*) or as long-term support within more stable unions. What was being criticized was the allegedly increasing overt female interest in extracting money out of a promised, suggested, or actual

involvement with a man. If for some men women had always acted out of personal interest, for most this was a relatively novel and skyrocketing trend. A friend of mine, talking about some village girls, would say that he had liked them when they were “naïve”, “simple”, or *sumisas* (submissive) but that upon “knowing” men they had turned into opportunists and schemers. Sexual contact with men, which was also said to irremediably alter women’s bodies (some people told me it was possible to know if a girl had lost her virginity by looking at her body, as, for instance, her hips would get bigger and wider), in various (and mainly in male) villagers’ narratives, simultaneously turned girls, especially when they were not monogamous, into money-driven individuals.

Despite the ideal of marriage, civil unions were probably the most common form of arrangement and widely accepted. A “respectable” woman could and can have different monogamous relations in her life, each resulting on offspring, without tainting her respectability but what subjected them to criticism was some women’s bizarre belief that they could act like men, having various relations at one time, and, above all, that they could disregard appearances. Señor Raul, in Barú, criticized young women’s habit of openly flirting with men and “asking them” (*pedir*) for things: that is, suggesting the possibility of involvement in order to attain a material reward, either in the form of monetary “collaboration”, of goods, or, in certain settings, of alcohol. Even in the case of men’s sexual life, despite the diffuse idea of men’s entitlement to multiple relationships, lack of discretion was frowned upon. Achievements men boasted about, could create conflict. Once such things were private, so hidden, Señor Raúl would say, that there were people in the village whose real paternity had been revealed only upon their death.

Young women had started to think differently. Instead of putting up with their men’s inconstancy, they had decided to take the same path. Some were even said to contribute to the economic support of prospective and current lovers.

Male polygamy?

Male “open” or “covert” “polygamy” was another characteristic of Gutiérrez De Piñeda’s (1987) classification. Various researches conducted within the Caribbean contexts tried to explain these dynamic by relating it to the cultural disruption and the dramatic changes brought about by the experience of transatlantic slavery (Smith, 2013; Clarke, 2000). These ideas starkly opposed those supported by researchers like Herskovits (in Barrow, 1996), who thought that this specific feature of the Afro-American and Caribbean family represented an “African survival”. Such classifications (and the theories built around the interpretation of specific ethnographies) are obviously difficult to evaluate and the data used to buttress or disprove them always susceptible to reinterpretation. What I can say is that many of the men I met seemed *eager to fit* this model. In fact, instead of considering conceptual models of masculinity^{xxvii} and of relationships as reflections of real practices it would be more prudent to think of them as ideological constructions, providing different kinds of gendered subjectivities, producing certain kinds of possibilities for “investment” (and for dis-investment) and granting men (and women) specific fantasies of identity and fantasies of power (Holloway, in Moore, 1994).

Studies centered on local and global forms of masculinity, like Connell’s (2005) works, showed that, even in a single context, different models for masculinity usually co-exist^{xxviii}. Connell argued that certain kinds of increasingly global, hegemonic masculinities produced through and diffused by the media, by international organizations and by neoliberal economic models, organize and structure the relationship between different models of masculinity (Connell in Moore, 1994) even in relatively traditional localities. Younger men and especially adolescents, in the island and in the city, perhaps

unsurprisingly, were the subjects for whom new, glocal, models of young, black masculinity, often associated with consumption, with TV or with the musical industry had more appeal. The history of local masculinity and of intimate interactions between women and men in the island of Barú can cast more light on the memories, practices and narratives which made the island a specific place, marked by certain mating and gender arrangements and, above all, by narratives about usual, bizarre, “natural” or “unnatural” sexual and sentimental interactions.

Señor Julio, before converting, had been an inveterate womanizer (or this is how he liked to picture himself for me). He had a theory about male irresistible call to be a *mujeriego*. If he hadn't become a Jehovah witness and if he had been younger, he sometimes said, he would have surely tested his long-honored skills with me. Being a *mujeriego*, he thought, was a sort of compulsion. The *hombre mujeriego* must try to “conquer ten women in a day in order to get one”, he explained. He is driven by his *guayabo*, a word that is commonly used to describe post-drinking hangovers, but that in this case described something in between nostalgia and a kind of affection which threatened to engulf the person. In order to forget the yesterday's one — and to be released from sentiments and memories—he would proclaim, a man had to find today's substitute. His adventurous life as a traveler had given him many opportunities to get intoxicated and to be healed from the ensuing hangover by successive intoxications. A man with different households, either in the villages or in Cartagena, was not an uncommon sight.

Ronnie's theory about male “polygamy” encompassed traditional ideas about gender roles and, increasingly, Christian rhetoric on nuclear family. He thought that some men would long for a kind of woman that he defined as *mujer completa* (a “complete” woman) He was convinced that unconverted men inevitably looked for “variety”. He sometimes attributed the failure of certain relationships to women's work or their “freedom”, mainly obtained and maintained through employment outside the domestic realm, a practice that, for some men, had to be fought, as it put in women's heads dissent, strengthening the idea that they also could decide and order about. When their partners came back home the working women wouldn't have the strength to tend to their needs (*atenderlos*) any more. Men, thus, placated the urge to restore their right to a “complete” affective, sexual and domestic satisfaction by delocalizing the functions a woman was supposed to perform and reassembling the complete experience across a network of households. These practices made for a more variegated but generally conflicted life.

What was more difficult to explain for me, was some women's interest in men who had a reputation for being *mujeriegos*. In one of the villages, for example, a woman who was a devout evangelical had tolerated her husband's multiple and relatively stable relationships for a long time. At the beginning of my fieldwork I had struggled to make sense of the confusion provoked by the sight of his picture hanging on the Pentecostal woman's house and of his person placidly splayed on another women's porch. He worked as a security guard (*celador*) and *celadores*, I realized, having a relatively stable job and experience which could always be useful in the burgeoning market of security services, were considered a good match. Other women, though, younger and not obliged to condescendence and obedience by their religious convictions, nevertheless seemed attracted by men who already had multiple households. Some female friends of mine thought that many women believed that a man who could support various “wives” was wealthy and were thus lured by money. Other thought these men had the reputation for being virile and that some women felt attracted by this. Others, yet, said women's main motives, when they went after other women's partners were female enmity and envy. They wanted to prove to other women that, no matter how snobbish or choosy they might be, all females were doomed to go through the experience of deception and betrayal.

Yet, women did not tolerate male adventures and ideas or their multiple relationships as calmly as the wide diffusion of such practices could imply. Male sexual life caused tensions, conflicts and crises within households that became more serious when a fleeting pleasure turned into a fact that had to be acknowledged, either for its stability or because it produced offspring. Señora Paulina, Emilia's mother, told me she reluctantly forgave her husband only when he was about to die, because she couldn't stand his mute and pleading look. He had been a *sinverguenza* (shameless man) and had squandered money on alcohol and women. Other elderly women tolerated their husbands' presence in their houses but only occasionally talked to them and let their daughters care for their needs.

According to many of the young women I used to chat with, neither old men, sitting for most part of the day on their porches, nor young kids, playing on the streets, escaped the stereotype of the enthusiastic womanizer. The trembling man, despite his cataracts, could perfectly scan the swinging curves of young girls parading in front of his rocking chair; the little boy, asking a question or curious to know about me, was training his women-vanquishing skills. Couldn't I see he was already flirting? Both men and women were supposed to have urgent sexual drives but it was considered appropriate for a woman to show restraint, ideally though premarital chastity or "serial monogamy" or, at the very least, through discretion. Conversely, and especially in the case of young men, their virility, if they did not take advantage of any opportunity for sexual intercourse was always at risk. I often heard that women were more *machistas* than men themselves and if rejected they would spread rumors which questioned an individual's manliness. When we met in Cartagena, Libardo, a composer of Christian *champetas* and a recent Pentecostal convert, told me about the difficulties he experienced whenever he went back to Ararca. On the one hand he felt he couldn't participate anymore in the homo-social activities he used to indulge in with friends. On the other he suffered from one particular woman's pressure to have an affair with him. He was married and he didn't want to get involved with this woman but he feared the rumors she would spread. Libardo confessed that he often avoided to return to the village. He felt he ran the risk of getting entangled, again, within the social dynamics of his pre-conversion life.

Male bodies, male sexualities.

Dominant folk ideas about the male body conceived of it as a conduit for substances that must be periodically "discharged"^{xxix}. During puberty, or even before, children are customarily encouraged to have sexual experiences with donkeys. These practices have become part of widely known *costeño* folklore. The poet Raúl Gomez Jattín, a now deceased Cartagenero with a reputation for rebelliousness and for the subversion of the values associated with middle class respectability, dedicated a famous poem to his equine sexual partners, in which he magnified their virtues and compared them to the ambiguous qualities and bothersome pretensions of human lovers.

The line of ten years old boys moving along the road mounted on the back of donkeys, usually at dusk, in Ararca, was a sight I had always attributed a bucolic beauty. I knew that many jokes and stories in Colombia portrayed *costeños* as men who liked to indulge in sexual intercourse with donkeys but I had never thought that riding a donkey towards the *monte* could be something more than a children's game. An ararquero friend, Martín, after swearing that he personally thought women were better than donkeys, volunteered to explain what it was all about. Parents themselves would encourage their children. The practice was supposed to help them to physically grow better and it was believed that intercourse with a donkey could increase the male organ's length. According to Señora Aurora, in Barú, even doctors, when she was young, suggested solicitous

parents of young boys to let them train with the unfortunate animals. Just as menstrual blood is “bad” and must flow out of the body for a woman to keep her health, male semen must be expelled through intercourse or masturbation; otherwise it could invert its flow and reach parts of the bodies, like the brain, which shouldn’t get in contact with it, causing “madness”. The idea of a beneficial intercourse with donkeys was supported not only by a particular idea of male physiology but also by a certain vision of the animal’s body. The donkey’s vagina is supposed to “knead” (and stretch) a penis through rhythmic contractions. (There was also a term for this kind of movement. It is said that the donkey *zunguea*).

Streicker (1993) argued that in Cartagena’s popular world sex was always conceived of (by men) as an activity taking place with an inferior other, be it an animal, a woman or a feminized man. Although I recognize that his idea could reflect those of some men and, especially, some of their open, contextual narratives, especially in an all-male situation, it is difficult for me to accept it as a general principle. While it is true that nobody ever asked donkeys about their feelings towards individuals like Jattín (In fact, their incapacity to speak was, according to the poet, one of their main lures), it is also certain that donkeys were extremely well cared for in the past and that they were a valuable asset in peasants’ life. These sexual practices were shaped by ideas about male sexuality which represented male body as driven by compelling and “natural” impulses but in many of the stories I heard the she-donkey has “something”, difficult to know if only a physical characteristic or other mysterious qualities, which lures a man to the point that he can forget about his partner, his family, his human lovers and even his daily chores.

Señor Fermín, my Ararquero landlord, despite frowning upon the practice, that he considered dangerous and backward, knew many stories about men who had been so enthralled by their *burras* (she-donkeys) that they would sneak away from their marital bed in the night in order to visit the animal and had been therefore abandoned by their wives. In some cases villagers whose predilections were known had been given lively graphic nicknames. Interestingly, witches were often said to take the shape of she-donkeys. Donkeys often roamed freely about the village in the night. In Barú a drove of them slept just outside my room’s window. *Brujas* were also said to walk through the villages at night-time, often in an animal shape. *Brujas* are the most dangerous among women, because they can use their *oraciones*, their knowledge, and bodily substances like menstrual blood, in order to bewitch men. Women, in general, and here I come back to Streicker’s proposition, can be dangerous. Their fluids, their sexuality and their secrets could pose threats to unguarded men. I could not find any stigmatization of female sexual pleasure or sexual activities in the Costa, at least among the popular sectors, as there seemed to be in other regions. Women were supposed to be monogamous and discreet but their sentiments and sexual drives were never questioned. In fact, I always heard, a man who could not regularly perform his marital duties was doomed to be discarded or betrayed.

As for homosexual men, my experience supports the findings of other researches of Latin-American contexts (Prieur, 2007; Lancaster, X). Annie Prieur (*ibid.*) showed that, in the Peruvian setting she studied, male virility wasn’t endangered by sexual activities with “feminine” men. She also stressed, and her findings are pertinent for my research, that such activities are usually maintained in a state of semi-secrecy. I often heard that a man “has the right to seven women and a man”. The phrase comes from the lyrics of a *vallenato*, a genre whose use of gender stereotypes and harnessing of regional imagery and rhetoric’s has been recently analyzed (Figuroa, 2009). In Barú some men were said to be homosexuals. One, a young boy, didn’t hide his sexual preference for

male partners, dressed with tight, trendy clothes, braided his hair, used makeup and had a number of female friends with which he would go to parties. Most people referred to him as a “woman”. Some young villagers didn’t have any problems in dancing with him, playing the “man”, as they would do with other women. He was criticized but it was sometimes recognized that, if he moved to a big city, such as Barranquilla, as other “like him” had done before, he could even turn into a famous hairdresser or start up other kinds of female business. It was rumored that young and not so young men used to have secret sexual encounters with him. According to some villagers, this young boy would pay his partners in exchange for sex. For others it was the other way around: he would get presents and payment from other men. Jokes circulated about these encounters and some people were said to have being caught in secluded spots with the boy. He was also said to keep a list of all the men he had been with in his room, a list whose content, of course, inspired curiosity. Men who were said to engage in this kind of interactions didn’t publicize them but weren’t thought of as homosexuals. In jokes and stories they were always portrayed as the “active” part of the encounter and the boy “feminized” as the passive partner. Some of the men supposedly involved in these activities, according to rumors, were married and were also known for having several “wives”.

There was a different case: a man who lived a precarious life and had serious problems with alcohol. His drinking habits, which made him neglect proper nutrition, were said to have caused him mental problems. “*Esta loco*” (He’s crazy) people would often say of him, perhaps to minimize the meaning of his dramatic exploits. When sober he would be serious and polite but when he was drunk he would start talking about the men he supposedly had sex with, indulging in detailed and rich mimicry and spurring most children’s fun and other men’s fury. In some cases he had been verbally and physically abused for his accounts of intimate encounters with other villagers. He was often derided and insulted. These male adventures are in fact not discussed publicly. As in Prieur’s (2007) ethnography, “masculine” men’s sexual freedom depended on the silencing and the feminization of other men. Yet, things, it seemed, were changing. Medical definitions of homo and hetero sexuality were starting to compete with traditional ones based on active and passive roles and some people, especially young women, insinuated that a man who had sex with another man, no matter what he actually did, was a man who liked men. And who really knew what men really did in such private encounters, anyway, they conspiratorially wondered. And who knows, I asked myself, if women, despite the lyrics of *vallenato* and male stories, hadn’t always thought like this?

Colonial and national institutions and international capital have produced and exploited ideas about race *and* gender ideologies. Unequal social interactions have been experienced, interpreted and recounted through the lens of mutually constituted racial and gender categorizations, which constructed normative and abnormal racialized sexualities. Afro-American men and “popular class” men in general, have been predominantly represented as coarse, sexually threatening and incapable of the restraint of higher classes and of the white people (Wade, 1997;2000; hooks, 2004; Streicker, 1993;1995). But dominant representations of black male sexuality have also been re-appropriated and idealized by black and popular class men, re-signified as talents, positive characteristics, hallmarks of identity, especially in contexts marked by discrimination and racial hierarchies (Urrea, in Wade, Urrea, Viveros, 2008; Viveros Vigoya, 2002). I was often told that an arrangement like the one my husband and I had could never work for *Costeños*. They were too *calientes* (“hot”). They couldn’t stand abstinence. The food people consumed in the Coast, especially fish, was considered a powerful aphrodisiac and was a further obstacle to sexual restraint. Men boasted about their capacity to produce

children, either underscoring the sexual acts through which they produced offspring or, in the case of more educated persons, the *crianza* they were able to give to all their children, manifested in their good behavior, respectful attitudes and in their success at school or at work. Upon comparing his life with those of some white and relatively wealthy *cachacos* who used to visit him, a friend of mine, who liked writing, had an astonishing knowledge about the island's environment and had felt sometimes that these people were taking advantage for their professional careers of a knowledge he would never be able to make public, indicated his children as his most precious achievement. Those *cachacos* didn't have any, although they had tried. And even if they had succeeded in producing children it was doubtful that they would have as many as him and as healthy and respectful.

“Going out”: gender and generations

With *Salirse* or *Salir* (going out) people commonly refer to youngsters entertaining their first “conjugal” relationship. Going out usually followed a template. People could say that a boy and a girl had “gone out” (*salieron, se salieron*) of their parents' houses or that a young man had taken a girl “out” of her parents' house, thus underscoring a man's active role and somehow underplaying a woman's one. In the first case, which was less common during my fieldwork, the couple would usually go for some time to a relative's or to a friend's house, in some cases even outside the village, or they would “run away” to the *monte*, where they would usually be retrieved and brought back to either the girl's or the boy's parents' house. Bringing them back together and allowing them to live under the same roof would constitute a public acknowledgement of their relationship. Pregnancy was recognized as the event which commonly precipitated a couple's *salida*. *Salidas* usually proliferated or intensified after graduation or the closure of the local school academic year, right before Christmas holidays^{xxx}.

As Mosquera (1999) noted in the nineties, *salidas* could be mysterious and secretive. Girls were said to have fallen asleep at their boyfriends' places or to have accidentally arrived home too late, only to find that their house door had been shut and wouldn't open at their request. *Salidas* incited gossip and multiplied rumors. Contrarily to the pattern of traditional “elopement”, usually studied within Mediterranean contexts, adolescents' *salidas* seldom ended in marriage. In the past a girl's family could occasionally have pressured a man or his family to regularize a relationship but it was now extremely rare. Indeed parents who did not approve of a boy's decision to bring home his girlfriend or had been forced to accept the accomplished fact would sometimes look forward a breakup. Most villagers felt that a boy's family (or, if this wasn't possible, a girl's family) had the obligation to accept the accomplished fact and support a girl and her future child, if she was pregnant. The exceptions, rare indeed, were considered disruptive and caused friction and hostility.

In order to understand “going out” as a relevant social practice and, above all, to interpret the reactions and discourses it produced within the Island and the re-arrangement of social and familiar interactions it provoked, it is important to look back at how *salidas* were staged and felt in the past. Señor Julio “took” his current wife “out” of her house four decades ago. The *salida* had been secret and caused by his wife's family's hostility towards the union. He was much older than his current wife, of a lower social standing and had children already. After the *salida* was consumed, as it often happens, the girl's family put conditions to the continuance of the relationships. Señor Julio was obliged to stop traveling (“*Me pusieron la isla por carcel*”, he said, with his usual sense of humor, “they decided the island would be my jail/punishment”). Secondly, he had to get married

with the girl whose reputation he had damaged. The wedding was organized, after some time, in neighboring Santa Ana, where the bride had some relatives. Señor Julio had to work on another villager's land in order to support his wife.

But things have changed in the Island. Land is scarce. The young's lack of interest towards the land was one of the elderly villagers' main complaints during my fieldwork. Traditional activities had waned or had often become more precarious. Some young men would talk about the boats, mansions, cars and beautiful women filling their *patrones*' villas as if they had been theirs, part of their life and of their future. Señor Joaquín, for some time the psychologist of Felipe Cabrera School in Barú, whom I often visited and talked to during the first part of my fieldwork, used to tell me how some youngsters justified their lack of interest in school activities by saying that they wouldn't need education in their life: they would work in their fathers' "islands". His vigorous attempts to underscore the difference between a *celador* and *dueño* (owner) would meet with scarce interest. Señor Joaquín complained that many of his students couldn't see him as the alternative model he thought he was offering: neither that of a splurging *traqueto* (drug trafficker) nor of a *celador* but that of a man coming from popular sectors who had achieved a certain stability through hard work and could sometimes play the tourist with his family on a beach of Cartagena.

Furthermore, despite the narratives about current "disorder", despite the discourses predicting the disastrous metamorphosis of the village into a city slum, despite the explicit movements of *champeta* and the graphic lyrics of *reggaeton*, there was still a traditional, conservative attitude towards young people's and especially young women's sexuality in the island. I sometimes wondered if *champeta* and *reggaeton* themselves meant so much to local youngsters because they constituted an opportunity to partially express and live significant aspects of their sexuality in a place where encounters between young people were fraught with difficulties and contradictory expectations. I felt that many teen-agers were torn between the competing discourses of traditional sexual mores and images and narratives which commoditized sexual experiences (simultaneously providing some opportunities for "liberation") and which were connected with television, music and global/Latin/Caribbean youth culture. The emphasis on living the "moment", on the performance of certain kinds of masculinity and femininity—revolving around seduction, consumption and more fluid interactions between men and women—a juvenile subculture with incited to the enjoyment of pleasures of romantic and sexual encounters, contrasted with, and defied, the lack of places and activities, outside the school, where boys and girls could meet and spend time together. Youngsters had to deal with parental control, with economic difficulties and with the contradictory expectations of the adults.

Of a girl and a boy who were getting to know each other but whose furtive encounters were not known to their families it was said that they saw each other *en lo oscuro*, which was a metaphorical and literary expression. Youngsters did meet in the dark *callejones* (alleys) of the villages and they predominantly did it to escape rumors, gossip and swift attributions which could turn a flirt into a threat, a problem or into a more serious commitment. These alleys were also the scenes of many sexual encounters and stories circulated about teenagers being discovered and pursued by an enraged father.

As in the past, adulthood and maleness, in the Island, were still defined by the capacity of having offspring and engage in sexual relations but the economic and social structures and activities within which adulthood and manhood had been performed and had been experienced had changed. Girls' inclination towards *salidas* was often justified by underscoring their desire to be considered adult, escaping parental control, being able to get out from a school life often seen as a painful obligation and, of course, being cared for by another person, although only in a short-term perspective. Women stood to lose a

lot, either in the past or in the present. Once a partner could be imposed upon them by parents who looked for social ascension or by, as Esperanza put it, by the “elders’ word” (*la palabra de los viejos*). Nowadays female sexual and sentimental independence were more accepted but girls still lived in a social milieu in which male sexual and sentimental experiences were treasured and often made a man more attractive and desirable, while females ones were recounted as *fracasos* (failures). Women were still the ones who faced community disapproval and gossip and the ones whose “value” in local markets of heterosexual relationships decreased with each “failure”, while that of their partner usually increased with each imputed lover or child. In my experience, and according to the women I spoke with, abortion was quite common and, prior to the advent of global media and of global religious narratives, hadn’t been particularly stigmatized. The precarious conditions of its realizations had nevertheless sometimes made victims. During my fieldwork, an NGO was working to discreetly provide information and assistance to women despite the restrictive laws, but the burden of unwanted pregnancies and the price of unsafe abortions were born by young women, as anywhere else.

Women and men: gossip and conflicts.

The increased use of violence among youngsters, some of them raised in Cartagena, was one of the main preoccupations in the village of Barú during my fieldwork. Open conflict between older adults was rare, though. It was not that adult men didn’t fight nor had violent disagreement. It’s that men’s sociality and male spaces of socialization provided the setting where masculinity could be tested and enhanced discursively, where it could be defended through words, jokes, stories, where men could act as intermediates in other men’s conflicts. Male enjoyment of their camaraderie and solidarity, as their freedom to indulge in the cultivation of friendship, also hinged on male cooptation of public territory, on an artificial separation between domestic and public domain. Many men tried to keep their partners out of these territories, where they would be exposed to the attentions of other men and propel crises within their homosocial micro-world. Violent conflict between women and men, though, and, above all, rumors and gossip about old enmities or occasional fights between female rivals were common.

Rumors and gossip have long been considered the “backstage discourse” (Scott, 2008) of subaltern people, the “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) through which dissent or any sentiment, feeling and disposition in-between compliance with hegemonic structure and overt dissent (Samper, 2002) can be voiced^{xxxix}. Rumors interpret interactions and events, attribute intentions and draw causal lines. They insinuate resistance and they represent a way of exercising some form of control over ambiguous situations and information (Scott, 2002). Rumors can express collective anxieties (Jung, in Samper, 2002), fears and concerns which cannot easily be acknowledged directly. As they’re told and retold, reshaped and transformed, each person who scatters, slightly modifies, retrieves or interprets them endows these quasi-stories with something of his or herself.

Words, as with Mauss’ gift, contain and disseminate something of the person who crafts and utters them (Tambiah, 1968; Dilley, 2004). Words are simultaneously material and immaterial, spontaneous, and given (Tambiah, 1968), as given are language and modes of speech. They produce tangible effects, stirring emotions, modifying perceptions and thus constituting the basis for action and judgments but they are also immaterial, easily slipping into oblivion, easily twisted and manipulated. Rumors use the simultaneously evocative, transformative potential of words and their immateriality. They generate observable effects but they dilute responsibilities and motives. It seems then inevitable that rumors and gossip should be related to envy and witchcraft. As witchcraft

they transform, disseminate doubts about the identity of people and the apparent concreteness of facts and objects and about human sentiments. As witchcraft they transgress boundaries and contaminate what they touch, as if following the mechanisms of sympathetic magic. Rumors create audiences (Scott, 2008) and they foster community and cohesion (Dunbar in Samper, 2002) as well as division and conflict. Rumors are a form of resistance and disobedience but also a way to attack and destroy and a means to uphold traditional powers and hegemonic values. In most cases they probably achieve both goals at the same time.

Rumors about magically performed husbands-theft, for instance, or those which insinuate that a macho could be a *maricón* (vulgar word for gay), can constitute a form of rebellion but also reproduce dominant views of gender roles and sexuality. Streicker (1993;1995) argued that rumors and gossip were used in popular class Cartagena in order to reproduce hierarchical relations and maintain gender and generational dominance. In his fieldwork site rumors and accusations of witchcraft or of moral lassitude prevented women from routinely occupying public spaces used and claimed by men. Moreover, through rumors and through definitions and representations which stemmed from rumors and gossip women were prevented from sharing labor, knowledge, information and company, as men had traditionally done, and thus from exercising the solidarity whose existence rumors about female friendships or interactions always questioned.

When I met for the first time Lavinia Fiori, an anthropologist who has worked in the Islands of Rosario and in Bocachica, the subject of women's animosity towards each other soon came up in our conversation. She had tried to set up a female cooperative in Bocachica but rumors, suspicions and various kinds of accusations and prejudices many women held against other female villagers had always hindered her efforts. She was so puzzled by this fact that she thought it could constitute an interesting (and useful) object of research. The answers I got when I decided to follow up on the issue which troubled Lavinia inevitably sent me back towards "gossip" and "envy". Girls were said to be envious of other girls' beauty and appeal. Women were said to be envious of other women's luck in finding a supportive or wealthier partner. Incautious interactions between young women were said to foster rumors. Rumors could spoil reputations and ruin lives. They created pretexts for revenge and sorcery. People often insinuated doubts about a friend's real motives. They warned not to trust, they speculated, they interpreted according to gender stereotypes which endowed women with malicious intentions, with dangerous passions and personal interests which seemed incompatible with friendship or with sincere sentiments. Rumors often portrayed women as selfish and scheming and reproduced the idea that men, and especially another woman's men, and their money, constituted the only or the best solution for unhappy or unsatisfied women.

Women were almost invariably assigned the guilt, or most of it, in stories about "husbands-theft" (*robar maridos*). In these narratives I heard women justifying their involvement with another woman's partner by saying that they were merely taking back what the allegedly official wife had stolen from them, in a more or less distant time, or from another woman, sometimes through highly suspicious skills. Sometimes, as in Annie's case, the "other" could complain that the "official" one didn't care about her husband real sentiments and that she was curbing his right to be happy with the woman he really loved.

Although some men were said to use *brujería* to take advantage of women (*hacerles maldades*) or to win their reluctance, witchcraft accusation were usually waged against women. Rumors and accusations reproduced dominant interpretations, usual responses and subsequent rumors in a circular way. Rumors about women's maliciousness were self-fulfilling prophecies. They invoked what they described.

Questioning another woman's sincerity, her friendships, her moves, her motives, is emotionally and cognitively easier and less dangerous than questioning a system of representation and a sexual economy. Local hegemonic gender ideologies are self-explanatory. They are confirmed by common-sense. Countless stories of perfidious witches and innumerable rapacious female characters fill *telenovelas* and, day after day, validate these tenets.

Ambiguous sexual and economic exchanges

The ambiguity of "conjugal" relationships and of the feelings attributed to those who engaged in them, kindled open confrontations as well as rumor-led disputes. Skirmishes between women and men who were or had been involved in some sort of relationship were focused on issues as diverse as a child's paternity, money, "presents" or the chance and the obligation to look after a child. Some of these issues, like money, were spoken of openly. Others, like child "custody" were ambiguous and difficult to elaborate on.

Sexual intercourse was usually connected to economic exchange. Being adults, or autonomous, was also being able to enter these sexual/economic relationships. Young children were conscious of this^{xxxii}. They learnt at an early age that men were supposed to be able to give and had the right to get something in exchange. When a man went to live with a woman or had a stable relationship with her he was supposed to buy her *chocoros* (pots, pans, and things she would use to cook and take care of the house) and contribute to her support while the woman had to provide domestic and sexual labor. And for very young and poor women sleeping with a man in exchange for money or insinuating the possibility of a similar, but temporal, contract was a way of obtaining indispensable resources by following a path which most women, whether donning a wedding ring or enumerating their *fracasos*, had treaded.

The commodification of female bodies hasn't started with the global media and with modern consumerism. Señor Julio, while talking about the "golden times" of smuggling, said that there were men in the village who had accrued such a wealth that they would "buy women".

"...for example, he (VC, one of the men who had smuggling boats) would look at you, see that you were nice-looking, and he would like you and he had money, he sailed...he'd come where my mother was, who was poor, and he'd say: look, I am going to open up a business for you, I am going to bring you a sack of cloth, I am going to help so that I can get your daughter...so we, because of poverty, we would, she and I(the father) help to get you as his *mujer*...Many did it. Almost all Barú was poor..."

What made these "arrangements" different and, for some people, less reproachable, was the control a woman's family would exercise on them and the promise of stable "collaboration", which would, in theory, guarantee support for a woman, her family and the eventual offspring. Women's decisional autonomy, their active search for more advantageous conditions within the local market of heterosexual relations, their circulation through male public spaces, their avoidance of or rupture with some of the tacit rules of exchange—not the fact that they exchanged sex for money or other items—made their behavior "disorderly"^{xxxiii} in the eyes of some villagers. Moreover, nowadays women could also be criticized for spending the money they got through sexual encounters for futile "luxury" items. Interestingly, women (and families) who benefited from social programs like *Familias en Acción* or UNIDOS, were, similarly, often accused of spending on *lujos*, partying, clothes, unnecessary furniture, while "serious" women or women of the past would sacrifice or would have done so for their children.

Conflicts between men and women who had engaged in a relationship at some point in their lives could go on for years or decades. In male discourses attempts to “tie up” a man through a child or cheating a husband or prospective husband by suggesting paternity were frequent. I sensed there was disagreement on what exactly would bind a man to provide support to a woman. What was obvious, from what I have described so far, is that sexual intercourse must be “paid” with something, money, presents, food or other kinds of “support”. *Colaborar* (collaboration) implied sexual intercourse to such a point that a friend of mine, who had divorced many years before from her husband, couldn’t ask for his support when she and their children had found themselves in a critical situation, because the man had made clear that “collaboration” had to be rewarded with sexual access, despite they both had new partners. For other women, though (at least this was their public discourse), a woman *puede exigirle a un hombre* (can demand something from a man) only when she has children with him.

I remember a particular occasion, a wake, in Ararca, where this topic came up. Elderly Eperanza was recounting the story of a son of her who had recently died (through “supernatural” harm. People had been envious of him) in Caracas. Her son’s death had fostered some disputes within the extended family. The man had left a house in Caracas, which had been rented. The woman who had been the man’s partner in the moment of his death and his children (thus his children’s mother) alike claimed the house as theirs. Esperanza herself was confused. She had suggested that maybe the money could be shared. My neighbor Pilar, who lived together with an older man, and had a son with him and two other children, protested against what she saw as an injustice. “*Si no le ha parido*” (“If she hasn’t born him a child”), she said of the dead man’s former partner, she cannot demand anything. Only when you give birth you have the right to require something from a man, she declared. This was the reason why she had decided not to undergo tubal ligation, she explained. How could she demand her current partner’s support if she hadn’t given him a child? This contraposition between the position and demands of “mothers” and simple *mujeres* gave rise to a host of conflicts. Giving and/or receiving presents are activities that produce frictions and show some ambivalence. Men were said to give presents with a view to receive sexual favor in exchange. Women were said to take advantage of male wages insinuating the possibility of intercourse or relation and, as well, giving sex in exchange for money, thus stripping legitimate *esposas* and children of their economic rights.

Intimacy and witchcraft

Brujería (witchcraft) was the idiom which framed and gave meaning to sexual/sentimental/economic interactions and as well as to changes in the ways fundamental social dynamics which were pivotal for people’s sense and ideas of community were perceived and given meaning. Through witchcraft men whose “virility” had been proved through children and female conquests could be reduced to impotence if, for instance, a discarded woman’s mother-in-law put her knowledge to work. Sorcery could make a not so young woman with several children more attractive than a legitimate wife a man had known when she was a still a *señorita*, whose children he would have to support. It could make a man who clung to his land wither and die, so that his siblings could dispose of his part of inheritance. It gave an elderly woman the power to make her young grandson invisible while he entered other people’s houses at night and took what “wasn’t his” (*las cosas ajenas*). It could bring people together and separate them forever, turning geographical distance into an insuperable divide, cutting out crevices within and between individuals. In this sense, witchcraft, although could partially be seen as a

“democratizing” and social leveling practice, also restored status quo, reproducing mainstream ideals and stereotypes. Gossip often has the same results. The realm of gossip and that of *brujería* overlap. Both deal with the management of relational distance. Both deal with kinships and its ambiguities. If the *brujas de hilo*, insinuating themselves through fissures of the roof, attack the young and severe connections and generations, the *bruja parelera*, who spies on people and spread rumors about them, operates between the public space and the house’s private space.

Sandra, in Ararca, had been the victim of envy, which acts through and like witchcraft. Her former partner’s “wife” had asked her to keep and raise one of her kids (by Sandra’s partner) and she had refused, saying that she already had enough difficulties in supporting her children. When Sandra started feeling unwell—and when she started having problems with her partner—she went to visit a woman who prescribed her some herbs to be used through baths. Through counsel, guide and co-interpretation, she realized that the other woman had sought to harm her. Other persons, whilst recommending me not to accept any person’s food or drink, talked about a substance, called *pimienta voladora* (flying pepper), a “transparent dust” (*un polvo transparente*) which didn’t have neither taste nor smell and had the power of inspiring a sudden, irresistible, urge to go away from a place. People who had been fed *pimienta voladora* were driven to embark on a journey along the physical and social established routes of migration. They were swallowed up by big cities like Caracas, Bogotá, Medellín. They made their home in God-forsaken villages and *fincas*. They seemed to forget their families and their past.

Annie’s life had been marked by the mysterious functioning of a relations-breaking and journey-prompting substance. Her father’s children (with another woman) had given something to her mother to make her go to Venezuela and never come back. According to Annie, they had been scared by their father’s intentions of leaving his wife and go and live with Annie’s mother, to whom he had promised a nice house. Annie’s father true feelings had been towards Annie’s mother, she assured, but the woman had been distanced through sorcery and the man, *decepcionado*, (offended by his lover abrupt and mysterious disappearance), had since then neglected her and her siblings. And of course, in Annie’s life, there was the strong influence of the “other”, neither young nor beautiful, to account for. Her older daughter was sure of what her father’s feelings had been before the “other” intervened through supernatural means. She had the certainty that something had been given to her father, something which made his affection towards the “other” grow and turn against his own family. Persons, who *knew*, from the Guajira, had confirmed her suspicions.

The idiom of witchcraft gave ambiguous feelings directionality and, conversely, reinstated ambiguity to situations, events and behaviors which questioned dominant, personal or collective representations. After all witchcraft really “worked magic”: it turned an uncaring father or partner into an otherwise loving, bewitched individual. Through witchcraft misfortune could be attributed to, for instance, a relative’s or an enemy’s envy, with less need, or no need at all, to question one’s deeds, decisions, abilities or to take a critical view of dominant ideologies. Witchcraft made enemies and survivors, who dragged along their baggage of afflictions, struggles and audiences. It (re-) created communal complaints, longings, and frameworks for interpreting past and current events.

I often heard expressions such as “I don’t know what happened to me” or “I don’t know why I did it”, when people referred to relationships they were or they had been involved in. Miriam and Annie thought that the first had been “tricked” into a liaison with one of her children’s father, whom, together with his father and uncle, was rumored to *know* about magic. Francisca, unhappily married with a man who had a longtime drug-

addiction, often wondered how she had ended up with her current husband. Even in this case, the man's family's reputation of meddling with "sorcery" provided her with a possible explanation.

According to Ronnie:

"There are occult things, used to tie up a woman or a man. For instance, I am telling you: never give your complete name to anyone. They (men) can have sex with you and the following day that is it. (C: What if I do not want to?) You would never say you do not want. You will want it. That is the point: that you will want. And more, you are going to look for the person who is doing that (magic), you are going just there. I mean: in that moment *you are not yourself*. Because when the reaction has finished you say: why did I do that? Why did I go where that person was and I had sex with him if I do not like him? It is something strange."

Actions and sentiments which did not fit the image of oneself which is publicly shown or the scripts according to which one usually performs gender, race and other constructs, could be justified through the shared language and the framework of witchcraft. Gaps, omissions, narrative streams, to put it in "Bruner-ian" terms, that did not "fit" into the narrative of a person's life and questioned the coherence and unity of a person's "self" could be processed and turned into experience and communicated through the cognitive and discursive recourse to "witchcraft".

Moreover, witchcraft mobilizes a language, ("tying up", "liberating", "dominating", "surrendering") which exudes "power" and continuously suggests, manipulates, transforms and builds on existing power relations. Witchcraft re-inscribes historical and current power relations within a person's body and within the horizon of their life. It conditions ("ties", again) subversion to the reproduction of some features of dominant ideologies.

Mary Douglas^{xxxiv} argued that witchcraft can reflect processes of "re-definition of social relations" in contexts in which these have traditionally been ambiguous or relatively flexible (in Kapferer, 2002). Witchcraft is, according to Douglas, particularly apt to signify dynamics of "bounding", "transgression", "control", and "freedom". Witchcraft crosses and remakes bodily, personal, social boundaries. Through accusations of witchcraft, thus, control can be exercised over potentially subversive behavior but transgressions to the social order can be expressed in recognizable terms and always muddled by contextual definitions of defensive and aggressive witchcraft. Not only does witchcraft "tie" bodies and wills, as a metanarrative it ties personal experience to essential social and religious themes (race, gender, place and memories, cosmology) and make them intelligible while maintaining their polysemy and open-ness. I will return to this in a later chapter.

From local perceptions of "disorder" to a History of Dis-order

"Disorder" is the product of different, interconnected dynamics. It is resistance and counter-hegemony. It is a reflection on social changes and ruptures, shaped through the language of dominant institutions. And it constitutes, in a wider, historical perspective, a colonial and neo-colonial project of repression of different values and ways of living.

People talked about "disorder" in different ways. The differences between younger and older generations were an important constitutive dimension of "disorder" narratives. Gender is another essential part. Being disorderly (*desordenados*) meant distinct things for men and women. Young men's disorder usually referred to aggressive gang-like sociality, abuse of alcohol, drug consumption and violent, disrespectful behavior towards

adults and women. Older men could also be disordered. They could use drugs; they could squander all their money on alcohol and with women. Male disorder often stemmed from the excess of identification with what Viveros Vigoya (2002) called the model of the *hombre quebrador* (a breaker of rules and commitments). Excess and lack of balance also meant forsaking obligations and reciprocity and thus forgetting social ties and forgetting or ignoring relevant memories. Disordered girls and women were called *callejeras* (spending too much time “in the street”, forsaking domestic obligations). Female disorder then contravened gender ideals of proper female behavior and the fiction of the availability and appropriateness of safer, female spaces.

Perceptions of “disorder” within the community are necessarily related to hegemonic, historical perceptions and representations of disorder and to hegemonic attempts to order people’s lives according to dominant moral tenets. Thus the history of the shifting perceptions of order and disorder must be complemented with a history of the hegemonic representations of “disorder” that historically recast black populations into the role of the unruly subjects. These representations have influenced popular sectors’ self-perceptions in different and contradictory ways and producing a mix of reject, re-appropriation and subversion. Reflecting on this history is first and foremost a way to show that disorderly (or exotic, strange, wild) masculinities, femininities, families and places have been shaped by long-standing power relations between popular sectors and elites. Bettina Ngweno (2007) argues, as we saw in the previous chapter, that the representations of Afro-Colombian, and especially, Afro-Caribbean groups as lacking in “culture” and “traditions” or in special, fundamental affective relationships with the land—all characteristics which mark common views of indigeneity and condition afro-Colombian political participation—have been the result of a protracted historical process of repression and persecution of black people’s practices and world-views. Similarly, I argue, “disorder” has been the result of a colonial and a national racial project.

Afro-Caribbean sociality and spirituality have been targeted by secular and religious authorities for centuries. The State, like the Colony, needed “order” and needed to order, to know, to govern, to harness popular labor, strength and support (see Lasso, 2006; Múnera, 2008). The Colombian State, whose ideological proclaims, at least in the first period of nation-building, sought to create a nation of whitened *mestizos*, tried to outlaw and transform the practices and values which threatened national elites’ political (and economic) project and the kind of “civilization” this entailed.

During the centuries in which slavery was the supporting column of Spanish imperial projects, slaves were often denied the possibility to marry or live together and their relationships were considered easily breakable. The economic and political regime which slavery sustained had vested interest in representing black males as hypersexual and unreliable. Black male “unruly” sexuality represented an essential economic asset. It produced new supplies of laborers and reinforced the idea that black men were dangerous and uncivilized and had to be subdued and kept under control. Furthermore, as bell hooks (2004) and other authors noted, (for instance Figueroa [2009] or Gutierrez de Pineda [1987]) black men’s alleged proclivity towards polygamous relationships has been more influenced by white elite men’s sexual mores than by remote “African” roots. In the *Costa*, only white *patrones* had the chance to support multiple households and simultaneously entertain various relationships. The white *patrón*’s right to demand sexual services from his female laborers has been and still is, as recent events related with sexual abuse and para-militarism in the coastal regions have uncovered, widely claimed and exercised. These and other socio-economic factors contributed to give black families a distinct shape.

Transatlantic slavery was built on the alienation, forced circulation and commodification of black bodies. Domestic labor, sexual exploitation and forced motherhood have been related aspects of the institutionalized abuse against black women for centuries (see for instance the works of Collins, 2008; Stoller, McClintock). Social progression through involvement in sexual/sentimental/economic relationships with white men or men of a higher social station has been a common strategy for poor black women since colonial times. These historical processes have naturalized black female bodies and sexualities as commercial and economic assets, not in opposition to white female bodies, but in a more straightforward, visible manner.

Collins has recently used for her work Denis Kandiyoti's (1988) idea of "patriarchal bargains", defined as the "implicit scripts that define, limit, inflect women's market and domestic options" and that through early socialization mold often unconscious aspects of their "gendered subjectivities". With the last phase of globalization, the terms of such negotiations are getting less and less convenient for poor women, as Collins (2008) argues (see also Carosio, 2009). For the moment, in the island, "stealing" another wife's man constitutes to date an efficient, if precarious and conflictive, tactic for ensuring a woman's and her children's survival.

Moreover, we must reflect upon the emergence of new global political assets and economic conditions and of concomitant *ideoscapes* and *mediascapes* (Appadurai, 2011), through which, in Cartagena, as anywhere else, memories are retrieved and given meaning and the future is imagined. Not only did hegemonic powers not understand black people's ceremonies, arrangements and historical resilience. They also naturalized them in order to exploit men and women alike and, later, to turn fluid models which were the result of power and of resistance strategies into regional "traits", folk motives which literature and the music industry reiterated and tourism has started to take advantage of.

Costeño music, for instance, as Wade (2000) showed, has been represented as a receptacle of eroticism and sensuality. This representation has also been instrumental to elite men's sexual enjoyment and freedom. Through *costeño* music, Figueroa (2009) argued recently, specifically focusing on *vallenato* (musical genre from the Department of Valledupar, now a national symbol, although prevalently associated with the Coast) *costeño* elites have diffused a representations of local gender relations and of social interactions that naturalized power imbalances between classes and genders and turned them into regional themes and national mythologies.

More recently, tourism begun exploiting representations of eroticized and romanticized individuals and places, while neglecting their non-marketable features (Sylvain, 2005). Cartagena's common touristic representations—its *palenqueras*, its black dancers, its beautiful girls—further sexualize black women and men's bodies, making black bodies and black labor, again, into economic resources for the entrepreneurial projects of local and (trans-)national elites.

The social, relational landscape of the Island is changing as much as its geographical one. Tourism, state institutions and NGOs, new religious congregations, and the media, to which an increasing part of the *crianza* is being entrusted, are the most recent "ordering" forces. They attempt to define, represent and narrate local subjectivities and relational forms. They try to enlist them in specific projects of place-making. Their endeavour is simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive. Their efforts are met with various responses, from uncritical or enthusiastic acceptance to veiled criticism or outright hostility. Furthermore, islanders have their own stories about the roots of disorder. They create narratives to make sense of ruptures and transformation, corruption and deception. The interaction between the institutional attempts at turning what is perceived as disorder into an orderly and productive social landscape and local attempts at

distinguishing between unruly resistance and the breakdown of village sociality are worth being explored further.

CHAPTER 3. Pentecostalism, Community and Social Change

Introduction

Pentecostalism is a lens through which the ethnographer can look at the manifold ways in which the historical experience of interstitial sociality articulates social change at an individual, micro-social and trans-territorial level. Pentecostalism is changing popular religiosity, producing new subjectivities and novel ways to relate to the past, to think about identity and otherness and to give sense to life experiences. It is transforming places and their constitutive interconnections with other territories.

Local evangelism simultaneously invests individual and social bodies and produces an alternative, *glocal*, body politics (for the use of these terms see Scheper-Hughes and Locke, 1987) in which new liberties, allegiances, obligations and subjectivities are shaped and old possibilities and interactional patterns are abandoned.

Pentecostalism is related to social and geographical liminality in a multitude of ways. The milieu in which it is growing rapidly is that of popular, predominantly *mestizo* and Afro Cartagena. It is a transformative force which combines and mediates between facets of popular religiosity which have been historically marginalized and global economic and entrepreneurial jargon, the aesthetics of modern media and the authority of Biblical texts. Church ministers often hold an ambiguous status. The same, but for different reasons, can be said of the members of village and popular neighbourhood congregations.

The links between Pentecostalism and movement are similarly intriguing. Transatlantic and trans-Caribbean movements have enormously helped to spread popular forms of Protestantism for centuries. Moreover, being an evangelical, in the Island and in Cartagena alike, often meant being considered a person who wants to “move on” and attain a better socioeconomic condition (*querer prosperar, salir adelante*). Finally, Pentecostalism represented a particular kind of *glocal* social movement. Evangelicals can be considered part of a special kind of social movement, aiming to transform local lives, local relational patterns, the ways in which people inhabit a gendered body and those in which the “divine” is experienced and narrated.

Pentecostalism operates as an “order-ing” force. It aspires to create religious subjectivities and social formations by (re-)binding (religion: *re-ligare*) people to particular perceptual frameworks, structures of meaning and of feeling (Williams, 1977) and to certain bodily and linguistic repertoires.

Attempts to make “order”, to distinguish and separate, categorize and purify, inevitably produce a new quota of “disorder”, as they transform local worlds, making them even more complex and spawning confrontations, conflicts and unforeseeable changes, and even end up altering the memories of the past from which uncorrupted traditions are said to have originated.

The Island’s churches

We slipped through the last *caño* (channel, narrow river), slowly emerging from the speckled shadow of the mangroves. It would suddenly appear: the whitewashed church, standing against the horizon, flanked by the gaudily-painted school building. It felt like the landscape evoked by Juan Gossaín in his *La muerte de Bola Triste*, in which the Cartagenero writer conjures up a nostalgic portrait of seamen’s wrinkled faces, blurred

by the smoke of the tobacco once used to keep mosquitos at bay. Back in the sixties, the time in which Gossaín's novel is set, and even now (despite the presence of Barú's "new" church only a few meters away), the old catholic building sat at the center of the village and by the harbor, as if embodying (and embedding) the memories of a village which has always clung to the land by dint of wealth, strength and knowledge acquired from the sea.

When I first came to the island the Catholic church on this side was shut for most of the week, as too was the one in Ararca, which, similarly painted in white, remained silent, gleaming in the fierce sun, while the small, modest, house which hosted the Pentecostal congregation of the village, vibrated with the chants and the words of the *hermanos*. People, during my fieldwork, recognized that the influence of Catholicism had progressively waned. In Barú, a group of women, informally directed by Poto, known as the *encargadas de la iglesia* ("women in charge of the church"), regularly swept and brushed, cleaned and washed the building. During my fieldwork they met once a week to read the Bible and talk about matters related with the upkeep of the edifice and the occasional visits of missionaries from Cartagena. Similarly, but less frequently, during my sojourn, in Ararca the church would open for a funeral, for the *misa de mes* (mass celebrated a month after the death of a person), that the dead require and the relatives have to concede, or for the occasional priest who came to baptize or to lead a prayer session.

In Ararca the church, built in 1986 with the help of a group of missionaries, stood at the end of the main street. In Barú, the space between the building and the school was still seen as the center of social life. In both cases Catholic practices were not common, if compared with the activity of protestant churches. Barú still celebrated the feast of the May Cross, referred to locally as the *Santica* (the little saint). Paintings of the *Santica* or simple stone crosses, set up in specific points of the village, kindled villagers' memory and visitors' curiosity. Ararqueros, though, did not seem to have the same devotion towards their San Martín de Porres, whom the missionaries that founded the church saw fit to turn into the patron of formerly patron-less and churchless Ararca. San Martín seemed to have a predilection for water, which had proved useful in the past, in times of drought, but during my fieldwork, and on other occasions, I was told, had prevented Ararqueros from celebrating his feast, at least on the right day, at the beginning of November, because in that period of the year it often rained heavily.

Poto's unrelenting quest for a priest willing to come to Barú would deserve a chapter of its own. I can't help but visualize her melancholy face, sitting on her rocking chair, a tall but sinewy woman always wearing a headscarf, swinging and swinging against a graciously tiled floor reminiscent of other, more prosperous times, while she told me about the letters she had sent to the bishop to petition for a priest. She would show me Mother Herlinda's picture, staring out from its shining frame and, also, from another era. Poto would underline that this Austrian Catholic missionary (who had worked hard in Ararca, building its church), who had at some point been labeled a "*guerrillera*" by Colombian authorities and therefore persecuted, together with other missionaries, had been a good friend of her late father Orlando. Mother Herlinda used to visit their family, she would say. She had indeed devoted her life to all the people of the Bay of Cartagena.

As the animated era of so-called Theology of Liberation drew to a close—the Catholic Church seemingly abandoning any further emancipatory effort—the influence that Catholic institutions had, however partially and discontinuously, exercised within rural communities, decreased further and rapidly. During my fieldwork a catholic NGO, *Fé y Alegría*, was in charge of managing the local School, the *Felipe Cabrera Institute*, in Barú. The presence of teachers or other members of the staff with Catholic allegiances had opened up certain possibilities for developing ecumenical activities, especially for the

young, but had also elicited some critics. In the village, the female members of some of the most traditional and respectable families of the village were, nonetheless, still associated by most fellow Baruleros with the practice of Catholicism. Although they did not have many opportunities to show their affection publicly and were being rapidly outnumbered by evangelicals, they still retained an aura of respectability and strove to keep the traditions (identified by them with catholic celebrations) alive.

The scarcity of Catholic ministers was mirrored by the profusion of Pentecostal ones, and above all by those with a call for travel and evangelization. For want of catholic priests and due to the absence of ceremonial alternatives, even in the Island, many villagers had turned to the new churches. Among those who did not, most tolerated, sometimes grudgingly, the spread of *otras religiones* (other religions). Some had found their ways of accommodating occasional evangelism within a flexible and individualized form of Catholicism and others looked at the mushrooming evangelical groups with preoccupation and accused them of pitting relatives and neighbors against each other, of betraying “traditions” and of cultivating fanaticism and subservience while drawing resources from already disadvantaged families.

Pentecostalism in Colombia

Research on Latin American Pentecostalism has focused on several dimensions of what has usually been perceived, from the sixties onward, as a shift towards a more pluralistic religious landscape (Levine, 2012). The first studies tended to stress the relation between conversion and urbanization and modernization (Willems, 1967; D’Epinay, 1969; Houtart, 1999). Controversies arose from the beginning about the effects and wider social implications of conversion. According to Willems (1967) and to authors who later advanced his position (like Martin, 1990), Pentecostalism had played, in Latin American peripheries, the same role that Methodism had played for the United States in a more distant past. It established a positive, democratizing process, through which disadvantaged people acquired skills and built new forms of collective engagement. On the other side of the debate, d’Epinay (1969) and, later, Bastian (1993), argued that Pentecostalism reproduced the hierarchical relations of the *hacienda* and that most churches were authoritarian organizations.

Later works stopped considering religious conversion to Protestantism as a response to social disorganization, breakdown and anomie (Vasquez and Williams, 2005). Researchers started to take into account other variables. Pentecostalism was “here” to stay and it was a complex phenomenon, which assumed distinct characteristics in different social and historical contexts. Despite the heterogeneity of its manifestation, though, certain considerations about its diffusion and acceptance had a more general validity. Pentecostalism has become a viable alternative in contexts where the Catholic Church, with its centuries-old power, has traditionally been associated with the whites’ power and with land-owning elites and an authoritarian state (Gros, 2000). Moreover, Pentecostalism hasn’t dismissed, marginalized or neglected peasant spiritual habitus (*ibid.*). It has, on the contrary, often incorporated popular, “black”, spirituality. It has given preference to the “carnavalesque”, to the “festive” (Parker, 1996), to the emotional (Corten in Beltran, 2003). Pentecostalism’s emphasis on story-telling, body language, song and movement has allowed vast sectors of the Latin American black population to preserve, enhance and positively value their religious habitus while giving them social recognition and spiritual authority^{xxxv}.

Pentecostalism has been particularly appealing for those social sectors whose place within national “imagined communities” (Anderson, 2006) has historically been

partial and contested (Segato, 2007). It has provided marginal, peripheral peoples and individuals with the chance to contribute to the construction of alternative “communities”: social formations where race and other ambiguously perceived and defined social categories apparently lose their previous importance in favor of individual charisma and achievements and compliance with a congregation’s morals and teachings.

Pentecostalism has altered certain kinds of gender inequality, partially changing the scripts according to which heterosexual conjugality was performed. According to authors like Brusco (2011) and Butler Flora (1976), who were among the first to study gender and Pentecostalism, the latter has provided popular class women with other women’s support, with alternative safety nets and with the chance to occupy a semi-public (Cucchiari, 1990) space in which their entitlements to authority and knowledge were recognized. Brusco (2011) saw Colombian (Cauca Valley) Pentecostalism as a form of female collective action, which mainly worked by changing male behavior and re-directing male activities towards the economic and affective sustenance of the household. Pentecostal practices have furthermore given women the possibility to get free from gender models which for centuries have emphasized “suffering” as the exemplary quality of womanhood and motherhood (Butler Flora, 1976). Conversion offers women the chance to heal the physical and emotional scars of patriarchy without explicitly rejecting its ideology (Cucchiari, 1990). It has given those men for whom proving their worthiness in other masculinity-(ies)-defining social arenas has been a difficult, precarious or impossible endeavor, a physical and symbolic space for actual or potential moral authority (*ibid.*). Equally, it has allowed other men to withdraw from the obligation of masculine camaraderie or male competition for prestige, status, women and resources (Alvarez, 2004).

I will elaborate more on these tendencies in the following sections. For the moment, suffice it to say that it soon becomes apparent, upon spending some time in Cartagena popular neighborhoods or in its rural *corregimientos*, that Pentecostalism has profoundly marked people’s ways of defining relatedness, of crafting family and community. It also has influenced villagers’ ways of relating to the past, of (re-) producing memory and, thus, of re-shaping their territories (Basso, 1996).

The once upon a time Church of the open seas

Elderly Baruleros would recount anecdotes from a not so distant past about relatives or neighbors who practiced Protestantism. The oldest stories usually referred to people attending a Baptist church. Some of these accounts were clearly describing individuals who had come to the Island from Anglophone and protestant San Andrés, others to villagers’ personal journeys. Cartagena, a major harbor, and for centuries an essential knot in a transatlantic and trans-Caribbean flux of movements and interactions, must certainly have been influenced by a religious denomination which was so widespread elsewhere in the Caribbean. The oldest Baptist church of Cartagena still demonstrates with its massive and solid proportions and its central position the importance that this faith once had. Nowadays the multiplication of the so-called “second wave” (starting in the seventies) Pentecostal denominations has diversified and made more complex the local religious landscape.

During my fieldwork “traditional” forms of Protestantism, like those represented by the Baptist church, had been surpassed by the new Pentecostal congregations, which with their missionary zeal seemed to reach into every hidden corner of the country. Señor Fermín, like other elderly islanders, didn’t understand the daily “jumping and shaking” of

the *evangélicos*. He would say this, while pointing with his chin at the small church in Ararca, but without shifting an inch from his plastic chair, as always set in the shade of the *terrazza* (veranda). For him praying and other ways of communicating with God didn't need to be boisterous. Other villagers had different opinions. The atmosphere and practices that Fermín despised and ridiculed seemed to be what they were eager for.

A variety of denominations

The IPUC (Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia), Barú.

It was the first congregation I visited. In the spring of 2011 it was still a shack covered by a precarious corrugated-iron roof under whose shadow white plastic chairs were set for the congregation. At the end of this rudimentary construction a curtain hung from the upper frame, parallel to the altar, giving the illusion of an exterior wall. Beyond the main ceremonial space there was a small garden, where Marleth, pastor Wilman's wife, had planted tomatoes and other vegetables. The pastor, his wife and their two children had recently arrived from a small village of the Department of Sucre. Pastor Wilman and Marleth were *costeños* but they were born and grew up in the neighboring departments of Magdalena and Atlántico. In 2012, when I went back after a brief holiday, the pastor and some *hermanos* had remodeled the church and the pastoral house and they had set up a protective fence and a small gate which could be locked up.

The IPUC was, after my initial attempts to visit a variety of congregations, the only church whose activities I regularly attended in Barú. One of its most celebrated ministers in the past had been a Barulero, a member of the Zúñiga family, one of the village's most influential and oldest lines. The IPUC is a long-established^{xxxvi}, solid, and sober Unitarian church, which sends its own missionaries all over the world. I feel that this organization stands in between the oldest forms of Protestantism, as Methodism and Baptism, and the new evangelical denominations. Elizabeth Brusco (2011), whose research took place in an IPUC congregation of the Cauca Valley, remarked that its members often felt "isolated" and distant from the other, Trinitarian, churches, which constituted the majority of evangelical churches. Even in Barú, and more than thirty-five years after Brusco's fieldwork, I can confirm Brusco's perceptions. Members of Trinitarian churches and of the IPUC neither "mixed" nor had particular sympathy for each other during my fieldwork. While the pastors kept to courtesy and formality, some of the "brothers" accused members of other congregations of religious impropriety, of ceremonial inefficacy and even of well-disguised witchcraft.

Arbol de Vida, Barú

I could hear the congregation singing and praising God every time I ventured out to the Pital (one of the poorest parts of the village). I never took that decisive step which would bring me inside the small building. It was too close to my IPUC friends' houses, in the Pital *barrio*, impudently to join this gathering, especially as the IPUC itself often organized a *culto de barrio*, in the street and just a couple of meters from *Arbol de Vida*. I never the less often met and spoke with its minister Pastor Julio, a young member of another ancient family of Barú, sometimes in the company of Ronnie, who started attending this congregation shortly after my arrival in the village. *Arbol de Vida* local section depended on the main church, located in Cartagena and Pastor Julio, just like Pastor Wilman, often travelled to the city to attend courses and meet with the church authorities. The officials, in turn, visited the village in some special occasions and brought to Barú missionaries from different parts of the country.

Roberto Zúñiga's church, Barú.

Señor Roberto had been for some time a member of *Arbol de Vida*, until the former pastor was sent to another town and was replaced by young Julio Gómez. Rumors implied that Roberto felt so deceived—he had expected to be the new pastor—that he left the congregation and set up a new one of his own, in the center of town. Roberto was also a Zúñiga and this is why, some said, he wouldn't want to come second to anyone. In his sixties, he was an extremely respected man who ran a small shop in his house and was often seen reading the Bible in the shadow of some trees opposite this establishment. Roberto was respected for his knowledge of the Bible and his gentle manners. He kept a low profile, compared to other evangelicals, and tended to his flock, which mainly consisted of the kids he also helped with their schoolwork.

Asambleas de Dios, Barú

Pastor Rodolfo, a Barulero who lived in nearby Santa Ana, traveled to the village almost every week and gathered with some people in the front room of a house he had rented. His church is part of the huge confederation of evangelical churches called the "*Asembleas de Dios*". Spectacular episodes of possession and exorcism routinely took place in the small house, during the *cultos*.

Misión Boston, Ararca

The *Misión*, founded in Barranquilla, was the only permanent religious congregation in Ararca (until the end of 2012, when another congregation opened a church in the village). It was the other church I was predominantly involved with during my fieldwork. I attended its celebrations in Ararca and occasionally in Cartagena. Pastor Vanegas and his wife, whose voices are broadcast for thousands of miles along the Coast by their Radio Esperanza, are the leading couple and have built around themselves a huge congregation. Their main temple in Cartagena, in the *barrio* of Torices, is a gigantic two-story building, with security guards and air-conditioning. Pastor Rita, who travelled from Cartagena at least once a week, was the main pastor in Ararca. Misión Boston is the only denomination, among those I have encountered, which had female ministers. In Ararca, MB's had about ten assiduous *hermanos*, who were in charge of the church and who never failed to open it four times a week, for the *culto*, or for the weekly *ayuno* (fastening). Other people often attended the functions too, some sporadically, others with more frequency, without being baptized or necessarily defining themselves as *crístianos*.

Testimonies of Conversion

Narrative practices are fundamental for the preservation and enhancement of Pentecostal communities. They constitute the basis of particular religious and congregational subjectivities, of collective identities, of communal activities. Testimonies circulate widely and connect people's lives with Biblical stories, within and across Pentecostal networks. They are (re-)told by pastors, members of the congregations, visitors. They are read, listened to and represented through films, DVDs and the internet. Every Pentecostal community has a narrative repertoire which is treasured, embellished, rehearsed, and aspirations to enlarge and widen its collection of stories.

"Testimonies" of conversion are a specialized genre. People often say that a person can be converted by testimony. Through narratives of this kind life is scanned for evidence of God's will and work. Through narration, with its "world-making" effects (Ochs and Capps, 1996) the past acquires a novel significance and God's work, his scripts

and the path He's supposed to trace for each individual, are made visible. Bruner (1987) writes that stories imitate life and life imitates stories. Testimonies of conversion (re-) structure lives and a convert's life unfolds within the landscapes which Christian meta-narrative provides. They grow, shift, and accommodate other elements and tunes. They are always incomplete realizations and their immediate delivery usually expresses current concerns.

These story-telling practices use and renew the extraordinary capacities for oral expression of a people whose experiences have been historically muted. Testimonies can be told in different ways and for distinct audiences. In Ararca, Barú and Cartagena they were told in formal gatherings; also, often in bits and pieces, during informal conversations. Testimonies were cherished and they also constituted a basis for status and prestige. They often constituted a sort of introduction to literacy, together with the study of the Bible. It is common to meet villagers who learnt how to read or write when they got involved with a church.

For this chapter I will use two testimonies of conversion and, in the final section, ethnographic fragments about the time I spent with Ronnie, who, during my fieldwork had started to attend a Pentecostal church, and whose embryonic testimony of conversion was also crafted, I think, out of our conversations and confrontations.

Francisca's story

Francisca held an important position among the *dorcas*, the women actively dedicated to the activities of the IPUC. Despite not having received a formal education and despite her difficult and, for many aspects, dramatic life, whenever she clutched at the microphone, in the church, she showed herself as an authoritative, confident preacher.

She didn't know much about her mother, who had left her when she was a small child. She longed for this nameless woman and often struggled to remember details of her family. Violence, so common in the history of Colombian peasants, had pushed her and her father out of the Department of Chocó. She remembered that people from other parts of the country had arrived and pressured local peasants to sell their land. Francisca's grandfather's *finca* was given away for little money and the family took refuge in Cartagena. There Francisca's father entrusted her to a local family. She was obliged to work hard and was treated unkindly. She later moved with her elderly grandfather and had her first *fracaso*. She got pregnant. Of this first man of her life, as many other women whose stories I heard, she never said anything more than that he wasn't the right person, as he had deceived her (*engañar*). She herself didn't know what had brought her close to him and thought that sorcery could have played a role.

At this point, Francisca's testimony started to brim with visions and wonders. The extraordinary experiences of her life had begun much earlier but every time she told me her story she underscored that this moment constituted a rupture, a divide between a life of survival and an existence marked by recognition and (self-) reflection. In order to discuss her conversion—the divine presence acknowledged retrospectively—Francisca always started from the same turning point: a disruptive, painful experience, a mysterious illness that possessed her when she was pregnant for the first time and was living with her grandfather in a slum of Cartagena. It has been noted that extra-ordinary experiences often prompt narratives which strive to explain, “frame”, capture, to make sense of the disruption of daily life (Jackson, 2002; Ochs and Capps, 1996). Biomedical language would probably define Francisca's “illness” as “preeclampsia”. She herself suggested this possibility, although she did not seem interested in any precise definition of her state.

Fluids and unnamed substances engulfed her body. This is what she felt was important. Her body was anchored to the bed, but her self had become more permeable. Pained, confounded, swelling, teetering on a thin edge between social tolerance and disapproval, her body had failed her but had also tuned in to other frequencies.

While lying in bed she had a “vision”:

“And suddenly I kind of fell asleep. *But asleep while I was awake*. I saw when God came. In the shape of Jesus Christ. I didn’t see his face. I saw his back. He was wearing a tunic with reddish and white stripes. A long tunic. And in his hand he had...you have seen the handle of an umbrella, a bit hunched... and [he said] Pablo [M’s grandfather], Pablo, Pablo, you are not going to heal her. And he says, because that was a vision, God gave me in that moment. And he says: who are you to say that I am not healing her? And he answers: don’t you know that I am Jesus of Nazareth? When he said “Jesus of Nazareth” the image disappeared. From that moment I started feeling better. From that moment I got up...wishing to take a bath...and I tell him, “*Nene*, who came here?” He says: “nobody, *m’hija*, why?” ... But, you see, before that all the neighbors were persecuting my grandfather. They wanted him to go to jail. Because they said that he had given me something to take, in order to abort (*echar*) the baby. He knew his little things, his little works (*trabajitos*) and the things the elders knew in the past... So they said he had given me something and six policemen came there with a car...and they say: “wouldn’t you like us to take you to the doctor”, they say, I said “yes”, but then I stopped and looked at them, they say: “get in the car”. What was that for? They had this idea that if I got in, they would take me to the hospital, and they would take my grandfather to the prison. But I didn’t know anything of that. I understand all that now, I understand that. Well, what happened? I said no. “I am not going anywhere with you”. (They said) “Don’t you realize in what state you are?” And yes, I was in a critical state, *swollen*, and yellow, I wouldn’t eat; I was really anemic, I was really sick. *I was dead*. And I said “no, I am not going anywhere with you”. “Why?” “Because if I haven’t died since the first month of pregnancy until this moment, when I am six months pregnant, I am not going to die anymore”. I spoke with faith in that moment and I don’t know why those words came out”

Francisca’s vision initiated a mythopoeic process (Price-Williams, 1987), which was strengthened with each retelling of her story. Not only had God’s power saved her. It also had made her subject of her own story. For Francisca, sorrows and suffering were obstacles and trials that mirrored those Jesus had gone through, making her special and cutting a path. Charisma, from Weber on, has been extensively associated with Protestantism. Francisca felt special. She sometimes said she was a woman of “mysteries”. “God has prepared great things for me”, other *evangélicos* often said. “Great things are coming”, said others. With these words they shaped their lives as wondrous and, somehow, open-ended. This sense of being special, of having authority, gave Francisca the power to lead and to (re)narrate.

Francisca later moved from the city and went to live to Barú with an older man, who worked as a carpenter for rich *finqueros*. She had other children. One of them died when he was very young. Her husband took her to nearby Isla Grande to help her recovering after the child’s death. When the man died Francisca went back to Barú with her kids. She met Carlos, her current *marido*. His family was involved in drugs selling and some members consumed cocaine and *bazuco*. She, also, started consuming drugs. She had health and family problems. Then, in a particularly critical moment, another vision marked a turning point in her life.

“...I used to feel I was about to die, Cristina, because that is horrible. That(drugs) gives you a *borrachera* (hangover), a horrible sensation...And I used to say: God, I do not want to be in this. Get me out from this. Get me out of this. I used to feel someone was coming to kill me. I used to feel someone was trying to strangle me. That someone was trying to choke me...I’d start to get on my knees, I had a small blue covered new testament and I read it all. I would read more than now, that I am baptized...you won’t believe that one day I got on my knees...praying to God again...God I am not this kind of person, get me out of this, I didn’t know what this was, I wasn’t born like this, I didn’t know this and bang! God made me sleep... [In the dream she saw]...a greenish mountain, big, a mountain, and there was Jesus again. And I saw him would search for his feet but I couldn’t see them. Yes, I noticed that very well. He was very tall.

Tall. I couldn't see his feet. And he was dressed in white, with a huge white robe. And that long hair, I would stroke his hair and he would just stare right in front of him, towards a mountain. But I would search for his face and he wouldn't let me see it...The Bible says we cannot see God until the day he comes back. Then we will see it just like it is. And yes. It is true. Because I would look for his face and if I had succeeded I would have died immediately. I wouldn't have come back from the dream. [as she continued looking at Jesus some parts of his body would continue to enlarge]...I didn't search anymore. I said: where am I? How is it that I am on top of him? And I would search and look at his hair, at his shoulder, I looked at the other arm, a very nice skin, a beautiful skin, beautiful skin, pinkish, pinkish, pinkish with some white there, so beautiful that skin. He had one hand...and the other like this (lifted and with his palm open) and there I was, on it. And it came to my mind, immediately in my mind: "And under his wings you will be safe". I immediately stood up. [And she screamed] That psalm is good! That psalm is great, it is great!"

Before this vision, she said, she used to go through experiences which only afterwards, after her religious instruction, she felt able to understand. She especially had a recurrent and inexplicable sensation, every day, at the same hour. She had tried everything to stop it from happening, but, like a seizure, it kept on returning, day after day.

"...Before that vision I was taken by such a despair, during the day, at twelve in the day...I don't know...I would feel like going out to the mountains, running ...I had the feeling my feet were in the air...the body, everything, everything, and they (voices) would say, in my mind: take a knife, and they'd make the shape of a bag with their hands, *swollen, tied up*, in the air, and they'd say : take a knife and run it through the bag. That was it. The bag would be left free of that air. Good, now run it through your feet, through the soles of your feet, run the knife through the soles of your feet...[C: Who was telling you?] The devil. In my head. Run it through the soles of your feet so that you can feel relieved. So that everything comes out, because I'd feel like a bag...And I'd start praying to God, praying to God...I'd tell it to the brothers, and they'd pray for me. When they'd pray for me ...I'd feel well. I'd feel better. At midday. And I used to say to T.[husband], T., move me from this house. It is like they have done something to this house, I don't feel well here, I am choking. I feel bad, bad. So we moved over there...towards the center of town. Inside the village, once again, after three months I'd have to look for a place to move again because I'd feel bad, I'd feel someone was crushing me, I'd feel like someone was tormenting my life, from inside..."

Pentecostalism gives states of altered consciousness a great importance. The moments in which the self's fibers unloose, because of rhythmic prayer, exhaustion, sleep deprivation, are those in which this permeability to the divine presence is shown. God demonstrates to his followers the possibilities (and threats) that have always been lodged inside them. "Inside" and "outside" are often confounded in Pentecostal discourses, as when people claim to gather and pray in the early morning because in those moments God can hear better his children's words. Pastor Wilman once lamented before his congregation that people always seemed preoccupied with intercepting phone and computer signals but they didn't seem to care about learning to "tune in" to God's frequency. Conversion is the process through which this peculiar form of "tuning in" slowly takes place. Pentecostalism restores the importance of dreams and of their collective interpretation. In her subsequent interpretation of her first vision, Francisca wasn't just suffering from a condition sometimes affecting pregnant women. Behind and beyond it all there was a design.

When she was ill, at her grandfather's place, her skin her turned "yellow", she remembered. Then God had given her blood and, thus, made her part of his covenant. It is interesting that in other occasions, in the church, the color yellow came up as a topic of conversation. The pastor joked with some church-goers, about their being *afrodescendientes* (children of Africa) and *morenitos* (little brown ones). Better being "afro" than being "yellowish" (*amarillito*) and "not knowing who you are", someone answered in one occasion. The phrase had been uttered by a person who had some grievances towards Francisca, who also was present, and I never understood if it was

meant to be a semiserious answer to the pastor or a hint about her. I nevertheless wondered, then, and I wonder now, about the possible meanings of being “yellow” in a context marked by the avoidance of “race” and, simultaneously, by the ambiguous and sometimes negative connotation of “blackness”. Francisca came from outside Barú and she said that she had her fairer skin from her *antioqueño* mother. She often remarked that until she had children who were born in Barú she had not been permitted to take a piece of land in order to build a house. She had been considered, when she was younger, as an attractive but somehow “disorderly” woman. According to some villagers, before being involved with the church, Francisca had kept a notebook full of magical charms. Pentecostalism often works by incorporating features of other religious practices and of non-Christian cosmologies (Meyer, 1999). In Barú it interacted dynamically with and contributed to changing the meaning and experience of practices, stories and ideas associated with cult of the saints, with *brujeria*, with other facets of popular Catholicism. Involvement with Pentecostal churches, together with the public display of the evangelical habitus, with the performance of Pentecostal self, can endow people who have been rumored and discriminated against with credibility and respectability.

Jesus’ blood, as Austin Broos (1987) noted in the case of female involvement in Evangelical churches in Jamaica, is said to wash away the dubious past, and the sins or negative characteristics associated in some social milieus with women’s body and their sexuality. In Ararca Señor Fermín told me how after he converted, some people had suggested to him that he had been “brainwashed” (*lavado del cerebro*); he would laugh and answer that Christ had indeed “washed” all of him. Part of what people perceived was indeed true: he was the same but, inside, he was another person. He belonged to a new community and acted according to other rules. Similarly, in Francisca’s case, God—in restoring her “color” and her blood volume in the critical moments of her life, and by making her part of a community where color (either fairer or darker than that of most local people) did not mark a person as a potentially disruptive or ambiguous individual—had materialized for her other possibilities. She could belong to another, smaller, but also wider, global, community. She could take pride in her past tribulations and simultaneously start afresh.

In Pentecostal narratives God is constantly engaged in a cosmic battle with his Enemy, *el Enemigo*, to win People’s bodies and souls. Although the body is seen as particularly permeable to the Devil’s influences, through the temptation He devises, the stress is sometimes put on the “mind”. I was told by people who had experienced psychological distress and had been treated as “psychiatric” cases that the Enemy wants to conquer people’s mind first. He does it by making it spin with self-destructive thoughts. Sometimes psychological labels like “depression” or “despair” were treated as spiritual entities working with the Enemy to conquer human beings not only through misdirecting and overworking their perceptions but also through entangling and obstructing their reason and their will. I can’t help but relate Francisca’s perception of being unbearably “swollen” with her swelling up during her sickness when pregnant for the first time. In both cases a malignant force was operating upon her, trying to seize her away from the grasp of God and from that of a potential community which could also provide the supportive interactions, the reflective audiences, she needed in order to craft a more coherent and autonomous self.

Francisca was also “full” of the intoxicating substance she had started consuming at her relatives’ place. The feeling of being “tied up” was recurrent in narratives of possession and of witchcraft and expressed the perception of malevolent external forces, either originating in one’s immediate surroundings or in a vaster, invisible cosmos which subtly or violently intrudes upon the body-self. Midday is, together with the night hours,

the moment of the day in which supernatural beings materialize. It was also the moment in which voices tormented Francisca. Feet, especially the soles, were locally seen as vehicles through which energies and substances present in the earth can seep into the body, harming it. People who walked barefoot for instance were very careful not to enter a cemetery, as the cold of death could harm their bodies. Voices asked Francisca to cut her soles and get free by detaching herself for good from the physical and social conditions she had felt, at some point, she could not control anymore.

Francisca's compulsion for running also resonates with ideas of the *monte* as the place where dangerous spiritual entities resided and wondrous things could happen. The *monte* was associated with magical encounters, with witchcraft, with clandestine sexual encounters, with childhood's free roaming, with an ambiguous freedom that could restore or dissolve the self. These malignant midday presences, that Francisca first attributed to some people's grudges against her, followed her from house to house and only started to dwindle after her vision of being seated on Jesus' hand and after she had agreed on an interpretation of that experience with authoritative individuals. She was "freed" from what other people or entities had brought upon her, while she was "bound" again by other, protecting, clarifying, emotionally cathartic metanarratives.

I also sense there are associations between "being swollen" and local ideas about the body and the "supernatural". I often heard that the excess of air, and winds could cause illness. "Winds" and "airs", especially damp, cold, winds, were associated with the dead and with spirits. *Aparatos* could manifest themselves with gushes of wind and people were said to use "invisible" and "odorless" substances to destroy a person through magical arts. In the "hydraulic" view of the body villagers expressed, the excess of fluids and humors was a lack of balance and must be purged. The excess of fluids also caused irritation and different kinds of commotion. By wounding herself Francisca would get free from these dangerous substances. I found myself comparing the feeling of detachment, of fragmentation, of non-belonging, that Francisca would experience every day — and that she tried to dispel by moving to different places, and from the periphery of the village, where drugs were sold and their use apparent, where the *monte* was close, where poorer or more marginal people lived, to the center—with her subsequent sensation of being on Jesus' hands, of being supported by a stronger, universal force that implicitly recognized her as a part of him.

Intimacy with divine figures

The fantasized and daily nurtured relationship with a caring Jesus can provide sustenance, support and enhanced self-esteem. Third-Wave Pentecostalism places a great importance on the cultivation of an intense relationship with Jesus and/or other biblical characters. For the Unitarian IPUC Jesus was the most powerful of these figures. Francisca repeated that since she had found Jesus she felt like she was "walking behind him". She called him her "family", her "companion", her "guide". In her dream he had shown himself as a fair skinned young man, with a sleek skin and soft hair. He was at the same time an object of aesthetic contemplation and the medium of an extra-ordinary sensory experience. He possessed the attributes of white power: straight hair and a light skin, but he cared for all his offspring and especially for the humble ones.

Facing the envy of the unconverted

Francisca had felt betrayed by many people in Barú. Her husband's family often accused her of being a bad influence for him. If she were a true Christian she would find a way to help him, they said. She sometimes felt people persecuted her because of her "spiritual gifts". During our conversation she recalled an event whereby social tensions,

naturalized power relations and the cosmic motive of the struggle between evil and good coalesced. She said that once she had been shown a verse from the Bible in a “dream”: “those who persecute you will never thrive”. When she had “woken up”, she had looked in the Scriptures and found the biblical passage she had heard in her dream. It was part of the book of Jeremiah. At first, Francisca had not understood why she had been shown those words but, in the subsequent days, certain events occurred, that made her realize that the Bible’s verse, God’s language, had been a warning. Later, in another vision she had seen a woman who used to visit her often in those times. Whenever Francisca had a problem with her husband and the man hit her, this woman would show up and inquire about what had happened. In Francisca’s vision the woman had seemed angry (*brava*). Francisca could not understand why. At first she had not linked the biblical passage she had previously dreamt about with this new vision. Then something happened to the woman. When Francisca heard about it she finally understood the meaning of her (quasi-)oneiric experience.

“Well...you won’t believe that after fifteen days [after F.’s dream/vision], or I’d say before those fifteen days, someone saw her in the shape of a dog? [She was]A *bruja*. She turned into a dog. They threw a stone at her with the left hand...don’t know how that was...and they hit her in the face.They broke something and that dog started screaming. The boy was accused, and he said no, I didn’t hit her.I hit a dog.She said such person hit me. No, no, I didn’t hit her. I didn’t hit her. I hit a dog... because he wanted to bite me. She turned herself into a dog... She was taken away. She was in the hospital for three months... God shows you. Danger getting closer, when it’s getting closer already and the person who wants to harm you.God says in Jeremiah that he sends punishment and he does... and an *indelible mark*. That will never be forgotten. And she still has it and sometimes it gets *swollen*.”

To bear a mark on the face is to bear it publicly and it means, somehow, acknowledging one’s guilt. In this excerpt collective interpretations of biblical verses, local beliefs in shape-shifting witches, and an idea of envy as a menacing force through which people can exert some measure of control on the life of others mingle with widespread ideas about female friendship. But Francisca’s story, co-constructed and re-arranged through time and through cycles of narration, also spared her and, perhaps, her listeners, from thinking about the systemic characteristics of recurrent male violence, even if it seemed to allude to them. For Francisca, who assured me that she still considered the wounded woman as a “friend”, her fellow villager’s swollen face was a reminder of God’s justice and of the dangers of human intimacy.

Through Pentecostal practices powerful cultural themes are reworked and attributed significance and a place within the Christian cosmos. In people’s life trajectories, carefully and repeatedly re-arranged into testimonies, the wondrous plays an essential role. Prophets and other biblical characters, whose life-stories are re-crafted and disseminated through a variety of cultural products, remind people that authorized engagement with the wondrous is accessible (and reserved to) God’s followers.

Karen’s story

Karen became little by little one of my dearest friends. I met her in Ararca, where she was still living while working as a maid at the Decameron Hotel. When she left her job and went to live in the outskirts of Cartagena with her brother I would often visit her or we would meet in the city center, at *La Castellana* shopping mall, or in *Misión Boston*’s main church. In Ararca she had lived with her mother until she was four. She had then moved to her father’s house, where her stepmother had taken care of her. Karen was very fond of her. She often referred to her as her “mum” and she claimed that this

woman was the only person who had ever been interested in sending her to school. During her childhood years and through her teens Karen had moved recurrently between her father's, her mother's and an aunt's house. When she was about thirteen, she had started working as a maid for a family living in a nearby village. She had subsequently lived and worked in several households. And it was while she was working for a family in nearby Pasacaballos, that she had started experiencing the "illness" that brought God into her life and her into a new community.

"To tell you the truth, Cristina, I felt unwell...the situation with my mother, the abuse...I was used up ...I am being sincere, Cristina, I am telling you. I used to ask myself why was I born...I have no reason to live ...first of all my parents do not look after me. I have to be like this, going from a place to another. Why do I have to, if I have a father and a mother...so I started listening to pastor Enrique Gómez's channel. His wife used to preach every morning and I started listening and God started talking to me. Through her...I remember she gave me a big New Testament as present ...the woman I was working for... so I started feeling that what the word would say was what I was going through."

Karen didn't feel reassured or supported by the people who were living with her. Then woman pertaining to an evangelical church started visiting her. She told me that this woman's appearance had been part of a divine design.

"...I say that God sent her right on time. I was going through difficult moments...the woman (she was working for) told me that she was going to send me back to my house because a coffin was worth more than I was...that a coffin was very expensive for her to buy one for me. I mean she said that I'd better go back to be buried and that was it... After that...God made a miracle ...I wasn't eating, Cristina. I was going around like a sleepwalker...I don't know...I used to think that my hands were pale, I'd say why am I like this, I didn't understand...pale ,pale, pale...and like a vertigo...look, to tell you the last things, I didn't think I had any value, I didn't value my body. I used to bathe in the patio but...I didn't care if a man saw me...I mean...not for pleasure, for the pleasure of being looked at but because I had lost the value of myself...And vertigo...vertigo above all. I felt like I was up in the clouds, like I was drugged"

As Karen started attending a local Church, as she felt she had found a community of people who understood, supported her and backed her decisions, a community of people for which she, as one of God's daughters, had an intrinsic value, the symptoms of her illness started dissipating. She started feeling that God's desire coincided with her own. She got back to primary school. During the following years she devoted all her energies to pursue her education goals and to her religious community. A female pastor helped with school fees and supplies. During the holidays she worked as a maid in Cartagena or in one of the small restaurants set up in Playa Blanca. Sometimes after completing secondary school she started working at the Decameron Hotel that opened up near Playa Blanca in 2009. With her earnings she was able to enroll into a University course, that she attended during weekends in Cartagena.

Reshaping and narrating family

When Karen lived in Ararca or visited the village, she divided her time between her mother's and her father's houses and those of other relatives or of church *hermanos*. She had grievances towards her father and her mother. She thought that both had neglected her and put her brothers over her. She criticized, as many other women, the once common habit of sending young girls to work as maids in urban households. Karen also thought that her mother, despite being proud of what her daughter had achieved on her own, didn't know how to show her appreciation and love. She hadn't been taught to do so. Karen struggled to change the ways in which intimate relationships had been lived and sentiments expressed or muted within her family. Despite the conflicts with her mother and despite her feelings about the past, she believed she had to make the effort of

showing the woman that she loved her, *as a daughter ought to*. Among the things she had learnt through her spiritual training there was the belief that it was possible, and desirable, for Christians, to change engrained relational forms which were passed down between generations. Spiritual weakness and lack of education turned experiences into habits and self-fulfilling prophecies that were handed down as some kind of curse. Although Karen sometimes used the language of “psi” sciences (one of her dreams was studying psychology and, besides this, many congregations offered pastoral counseling services featuring a combination of psychological theories and Christian sources) she interpreted her and her family’s story through Christian cosmology.

“Sometimes, like the Bible says, things are passed down from generation to generation. Perhaps God with me wanted to cut it. You are not going to live the same you lived with your mother. You are going to have a different life. One day my aunt told me, she told me: your grandmother with your great-grandmother...how they fought! My mother also wanted to have that with me...all the things I did were wrong[...]I say she admires me because I got ahead and although she doesn’t tell me I feel it is like this. My father once told my brother: look at Karen, nobody helped her, how she got ahead...you had the chance and you didn’t even take advantage of it. This is an example. God puts the example here on the earth, so that you can see. Sometimes you mistreat your children and you don’t know who is the one who is going to help you [...]All the children are the same, Cristina, you cannot prefer one over the other ...and my mother was like that. She would always prefer my younger brother. She said that it was because his father wasn’t alive anymore. So I used to say: what is the difference if my father doesn’t give me anything? And I would also tell her: you are neither the first nor the last woman who has lived without a husband.”

Pentecostalism places a great emphasis on nuclear family. People who get closer to evangelical churches learn to interpret their life along these lines. They usually express criticism towards family arrangements and ways of bringing up children which have been widespread in the past. Birgit Meyer (2001), among others, recognized that Pentecostalism, in Africa, has been essential to the “symbolic production of modern individuals who exert control over their personal life” (p.118). Moreover, Pentecostalism explicitly takes nuclear family as a model for the relationships within the congregation (Cucchiari, 1990). But the modern nuclear family is simultaneously re-proposed as an ideal and harshly criticized when its relational patterns and values are considered un-Christian or when family-life and familial spaces are seen as limiting or precluding long-term, intimate interactions within the religious community. Some people proudly declared that the church was their real family. Women neglected central tenets of the rhetoric of the caring nuclear family or of traditional gender and generation hierarchy —like obedience to one’s parents or husband —in order to retain their religious freedom. The divisive and conflictive potential of conversion was, for this reason, one of the arguments used by villagers who disapproved of evangelism. Karen, for instance, had to struggle against her mother when she decided to convert. Francisca still struggled against her husband. Many converts felt ostracized and ridiculed by the majority of their fellow villagers. They used various strategies in order to juggle between religious and familial commitments.

Body, gender and belonging

Karen remembered that one of the first things she was said when she joined the church was that by using the long skirts female members of conservative churches usually wore she was doomed to trample on it and injure herself. This curious warning, trivial as it may seem, encapsulates various concerns. Pentecostalism has in fact changed the way in which gender identity is embodied and by which appropriate, validated, gender performances become the basis for identity and community making.

Women, especially young ones, often dressed with tight, colorful and revealing clothes in the villages. In Ararca it was also common for people walking barefoot, especially during the rainy months and while covering short distances. Evangelical clothing differs according to a congregation's rules but in the Island and in most popular neighborhoods of Cartagena evangelists were usually recognizable for their skirts, long trousers and short sleeved shirts. I often heard that people who started going to the church slowly and spontaneously developed the desire to dress like most evangelicals did in their congregations, even because such clothes were said to be "smart" (*elegantes*). In this sense evangelism also functioned to introduce certain tastes and, above all, it stood for desire of and commitment to social advancement. Pastor Rita would always encourage Ararqueros to go to church in their best outfits. Stepping inside an evangelical church, especially in the city, is often a bizarre visual experience. It is like being catapulted in the middle of a wedding ceremony or of a business convention. Both themes, indeed, the feast and the company meeting, have much to do with how Pentecostals define themselves. Either in the IPUC or in *Misión Boston* I often heard of believers being described as the guests God had invited to his feast.

Simultaneously the idiom and the icons of corporate entities, of *empresas*, were often used during sermons. Pastor Wilman in Barú talked about evangelicals as the workers of "God's company" (*empresa de Dios*) and he and his wife Marleth often relayed for the congregation anecdotes about their past work in various Barranquilla's *empresas*. In these tales, companies were described as places where workers, in order to obtain and maintain their position and, above all, to be promoted to higher posts, had to learn how to wear the right clothes and to behave in a proper (good-mannered, deferential and responsible) way. The triad feast-church-company in sermons and testimonies was made to signify everything which was accurate, ordered, and respectful of hierarchies, which supposedly fostered prosperity and, also, that which local communities were said to lack.

People also repeatedly referred to the human body as "God's temple" (*templo de Dios*). Dressing in the appropriate way meant marking one's affiliation to a community which was partially set apart from the wider one but drew from meaningful external institutions (and their values) some of its symbols. Dress codes, and so the respect for them, were a signal of approved moral qualities. The body, especially the female one, was the vehicle through which Pentecostal moral stances were displayed and disseminated. A woman was required to find a balance between being "feminine", attractive and fashionable and being serious, orderly and respectful. In the IPUC or in *Misión Boston* women often donned tight dresses that highlighted their body shapes but did not expose their shoulders, thighs or their neckline. Cartagena's popular malls —like *Tierra Santa*, set in the popular shopping area of Bazurto Market and in Gestemaní neighborhood —cater to a growing evangelical population by selling a variety of knee-high skirts and shrugs which can be used over sleeveless tops. Dress codes are distinct in different communities —some prohibiting men and women alike to wear jewels or other ornaments, other being more liberal and flexible and other, still, forbidding even toiletries like perfumes and deodorants —but a standard evangelical dressing code does exist. It usually makes evangelical women recognizable.

The idea that Karen might trample on her long skirt also indicated a preoccupation with female body, often thought to be the medium through which women could draw economic support for them and their children. When entering a Church Community men and women alike, I was told, often expected to attain, among the various kinds of liberation from social, physical and psychological constraints they sought relief from, freedom from sentimental/sexual relationships perceived as insincere and malicious. Ronnie, in Barú longed to find a partner he could trust in good and in "bad"

(economically difficult) times. Similarly, women dreamed to meet faithful men, capable of appreciating them for their inner qualities and their companionship. This doesn't mean that economic considerations were not part of the process of choosing a partner within the evangelical milieu. On the contrary, predispositions for hard work, ambition, and a desire for material prosperity were considered desirable in a prospective partner. Pentecostal life, though, seemed to counterbalance, at least in part, the increasingly global commodification of female bodies.

Karen told me that, through her involvement with the church, she understood that nobody could “put a price” (*ponerle precio*) on her body. The episodes in which men had tried, in the village or while she worked at the Decameron, to offer her money in exchange for sex turned into occasions for the assertion of her worthiness. She did not care if people —whether hotel guests willing to experiment with the sensuous pleasures of an increasingly commoditized Caribbean or village men used to take for granted the sexual availability of young and poor women —did not understand her refusal and her complaints. They thought she was insane or stupid (*pendeja*). I sympathized with her, when she told me that her ways of scanning and decoding the world were interpreted as fanaticism or lack of pragmatism. Whenever Karen recounted these events, I could not help thinking about the expression Evangelicals often use when referring to the difference between their pre- and post-conversion perceptual world: “taking the band off one's eyes” (*quitarse la benda*). I would compare it with the emotions and perceptions that had started overwhelming me when, a student slightly younger than Karen, I had discovered that feminist texts helped me to make sense of my childhood and teen-age suffering. I too had gone around preaching the wonders of taking the band off one's eyes. The worlds Karen and I had inhabited and those we experienced after taking the band off our eyes were very different, but I understood her fervor.

When I met for the first time Pastor Rita, who led *Misión Boston* congregation in Ararca, she told me that she felt local unconverted men were stubbornly *machistas*. Converts were not, she thought. They would help with house-chores, they were not womanizers. They were different. An increasing range of studies have taken into consideration the gender dimensions of Pentecostal practices. Elizabeth Bruscos's (2011) pioneering research on a Cauca Valley branch of the IPUC portrayed the church as place where local gender relations could be partially renegotiated and women empowered through their official roles and through the acquisition of new skills. Pentecostalism changed male attitudes towards their spouses and their children, usually, increasing the economic status and the well-being of converted people's households. Brusco, indeed, saw female Pentecostal female involvement as a form of “female collective action”.

Butler Flora's (1976) work is well known among researchers interested in Pentecostal gender ideology. She argued that Pentecostalism represented a departure from “*Marianismo*” (Stevens and Pescatelli, 1973), the (contested) ideal of self-sacrificing, suffering womanhood, associated with Catholicism. The idea of the existence of a single ideal catholic femininity has been contested, like the depictions of intrinsically Latin American “*marianismo*” (or “*machismo*”, see Melhus and Stolen, 2007 and Gutmann, 2006), but I can only agree with the authors who underscore the transformative potentials of a religious community structured around the teachings of a triumphant divinity and not on those left by a suffering one. A triumphant Christ —often perceived by women as the trustworthy, joyous, supporting companion, spouse or father they gradually realize their lives lacked —is also often associated with a renovated sense of self-worth and with the entitlement to speak up, move on and lead.

Cucchiari (1990) interestingly noted that the Pentecostal God is male “at the explicit level” but it also is a “cultural crucible in which new modes of

masculinity/femininity are being forged”(p.693). Although believers often describe their religious community as some kind of “God ordained patriarchy”, different congregations offer women a chance to heal the “internal scars inflicted by a patriarchal order” (p.698). Pentecostal patriarchy, he argued, is more subtle and less “visible” than hegemonic one. This ambiguity makes Pentecostalism appealing for people who do not want or cannot deconstruct or question hegemonic gender ideas. Gill (1990), whose research context is urban Bolivia, wrote about the systematic avoidance of gender issues within Pentecostal churches. Pentecostalism maintains a precarious balance between female empowerment and female dependence, one which must be continuously re-negotiated (Scott, 1994) and whose compromises and contradictions are rarely voiced. It is difficult to guess to what extent women, in my fieldwork, perceived the contradictions between their real lives and the Christian ideals they often seemed to sustain, at least with the customary formulaic responses, during religious ceremonies. In the few cases in which I underscored some of these contradictions, women used strategic abstractions, re-interpretations and other cognitive techniques in order to avoid facing and justifying the meaning of particularly controversial words. Austin Broos (in Wardle, 2001) wrote about similar techniques, applied to avoid cognitive (and thus social) dissonance by various members of Christian communities and in distinct moments. She used the expression “gapping and filling”, to indicate the strategic and situational use of portions of the biblical texts to support or confute an argument. She (1987) also argued, in her study of Jamaican Pentecostalism, that Pentecostalism seemed to liberate women from the contradictions of local gender ideals, in contexts where procreation was what made a woman “feminine” and secured for her and her children male support. Pentecostalism with its emphasis on chastity and commitment to an exclusive relation with the Spirit, taking precedence over worldly relationships, prevented women from getting trapped within oppressive and potentially conflictive sexual and economic exchanges.

But what kind of gender “regime” did evangelical narratives, practices and imagination conjure up? What kind of gender interactions did they envision? Janise Hurtig (2002), in her study on gender and schooling in Venezuela, created the expression “negligent patriarchy”, which she defined as a cultural dynamic producing at the same time “desires” for relationships shaped by traditional gender ideology and the inevitable failure of the performance of hegemonic gender ideals, often perceived as a “crisis” of moral values. I found Hurtig’s formulation useful to reflect on the Island’s Pentecostalism and took some liberties in applying her idea of “negligent patriarchy” to another context.

One of the first celebrations I attended at the IPUC was the female Tuesday night one, the *Culto de Mujeres*. I was fascinated by the sweet voice of the pastor’s wife, Marleth, reclaiming respect for women as mothers and wives. I found myself drawn inside her tales of couples who had lost affection, patience and respect towards each other: women who would not wait any more for their husband’s return or receive him with a smile, men who would shout at their partners and never gratify them with a present, couples in which both members had come to neglect their appearance and manners. I understood that she invoked, instead, a marital life of courtesy and aesthetic and affective pleasures. I could sense the approval of people around me. When the possibility arose for Marleth’s husband to work as a pastor she left her job and dedicated herself to him and the children. This moment, of which she talked with some nostalgia for the life she had led and the independence it had given her, was for her husband an occasion to show he could support his family. Within the IPUC, in fact, a man cannot aspire to become a pastor if his wife works outside the house and the church. A pastor’s wife is allowed to do volunteer work but she is considered her husband’s main helper and must be free from any other time-consuming occupation.

Marleth and pastor Wilman's story of conversion and involvement with the church recapitulated the fundamental cultural themes of an ideal formation which I will call, following and reversing Hurtig's concept, "benevolent patriarchy". "Benevolent patriarchy" is a religious and a social ideal. It is mythology and prescription. It combines popular psychology and ad hoc interpretations of religious texts. Pentecostalism is attractive for women because it plays around this disjunction between the rhetoric of male authority and the reality of female deep involvement with the church. Without women's commitment, without their labor, evangelical churches could not survive. Church authorities and common members seem to show and convey an understanding of this crucial aspect of evangelical sociality. More often, though, female work is naturalized and its implications made invisible.

Pentecostalism envisions a society and a community in which men work hard to raise their kids and present their dedicated wives with the respect and the homages they deserve and in which money is not squandered in drinking, gambling or women-hunting but it is saved and possibly invested in a productive enterprise. It envisions a society of *cumplidores* (men who keep their promises), to paraphrase Mara Viveros' (2002) tension between *quebradores* (men who break promises and commitments) and *cumplidores* in her study of Colombian masculinity. The *cumplidor* man is faithful to his role as a provider, as a supporter. He is a knowledgeable, authoritative individual under whose shadow a micro-community, reflecting the structure of the Christian one, his family, thrives. Women crave "benevolent patriarchy" because it gives them the chance to actively work for the creation of this kind of social order. And indeed women who convert to Pentecostalism in Barú strenuously fight to bring their husbands close to the church. Women are the main missionary force of Pentecostalism. They have much to gain from their husband's involvement. "We have the privilege of being the only one for our husband", Marleth would say to the congregation. I remembered Francisca talking about her role as a "privileged daughter" of God. "Benevolent patriarchy" gives a woman, as a mother, a wife, a daughter, the power to influence, and guide without going through the uncertainties and the pain of recognizing the work of historical relations of power in their lives.

A new community

When Karen had problems she often found refuge at pastor's Ritas' place. When she had free time, in Ararca, she spent it at other *hermanos'* places. Like Francisca, she had found within the Church another, simultaneously wider and more intimate, community. I am talking about "community" at various levels here. Congregations can partially substitute families, village communities and the regional or national "imagined communities" with which individuals have been taught (with more or less vigor and with weaker or stronger results) to identify. Pentecostalism usually simultaneously re-shapes perceptions of and involvement with these three domains.

Disadvantaged black *costeños* have often felt abandoned by the state and their position within the nation-building myth of creolization/*mestizaje* has always been ambiguous. Diverse social and economic changes have produced, increasingly, in the last decades, shifts in the deployment of the categories (class, race/ethnicity, rural/urban divide, productive activities) which shaped villagers' identity in the past. The increased availability of religious options has made alternatives more viable. It is not a matter of *costeño* or *paisa*, of *cachaco*, or of *guajiro*, pastor Wilman preached, it is a matter of being brothers and sisters "in Christ" (*hermanos en Cristo*). It was a matter of being with or "not yet with" God. The difference between "converts" and the "unconverted" (not the God-less, as Pentecostalism, for which proselytizing is an essential part of religious

practices, optimistically caters to an infinite reservoir of potential Christians) subsumed previous differences, opening up alleys for alternatives (auto-) biographies and local stories and allowing some people to simultaneously reshape memories and aspirations on the basis of current glocal concerns.

Pentecostalism rendered accessible alternative ideas and visions of community. It didn't necessarily exclude national or regional values. Pentecostalism also uses nationalist icons and discourses and, in Colombia, evangelism has already entered the political arena, although not with the same intensity of other countries. Distinct forms of agency can be tied to new and hybrid ideas of and feelings about community, even more so when, as it happens, congregations foster and spread ideas and feelings about their alleged antiquity and originality. According to pastor Wilman, the IPUC was the real church Jesus Christ had devised. Most of its members had to go underground or adopt a "low profile" along the centuries but the community had started to grow again, as it had been meant to do from the beginning. But the IPUC was also global and made an extensive use of modern media. It now has missions in almost every continent. Even smaller churches like *Misión Boston* strive to get larger and fund new *obras*.

Missionary zeal is a fundamental part of involvement with the church. *Hermano David* in Ararca or Pastor Rodolfo in Santa Ana, often told me dreamt of travelling to faraway places in order to establish new Christian communities and Karen herself often thought about travelling and she liked to meet on-line Christians from other South American countries. The novelty, in these longings and desires, was the relative accessibility of these paths and of their associated prestige to historically marginalized people. New were also the ways in which such global Christian community was imagined and represented through the production and the consumption of particular cultural products (Christian music, Christian films,) and commodities (clothes, books, DVDs, etc.) and through now common social practices like Christian conventions, concerts, trips, trainings, holiday-camps and, increasingly, virtual platforms (Christian Facebook, Christian chats). Being part of this Christian world, reaching down to the past while projecting people towards a prosperous future, was also an opportunity to be partially exempt from living according to the rules most villagers felt compelled to follow.

Sensational forms and religious communities

When Karen described how she felt during the illness which brought to her conversion, she reminded me of the way people who are thought to have been affected by witchcraft described their conditions: the weakness, the apathy, the sleepiness, the fragmentation of self, consumed and bent to another's person's desires. And when Karen defined her condition she recurred to an expression that has a great historical and cultural resonance in Cartagena's popular world and that also shares witchcraft's semantic and metaphorical domain: she said that she was drugged. Being drugged has become, together with being "tied" through magic, an efficacious metaphor for the control that people feel can be exerted upon them by forces they cannot specify or visualize in detail.

Paradoxically, while the material world lost its consistence during her illness, Karen was able to get hold on an apparently immaterial thing like the flow of words coming from a radio station. Then other words came, more solid, these times, suggesting the existence of another community and of other possibilities. Each religious community has its "sensational forms", its "authorized modes" of invoking, justifying and representing "access to the transcendental" (Meyer, 2006, p.6). Sensational forms, as Meyer argued, simultaneously shape subjectivities and communities. They create and foster feelings of belonging and, at the same time, feelings of immediacy and spontaneity. *Misión Boston* (contrary to the IPUC) allowed its attendants greater freedom and

expressivity than other denominations. In Cartagena's *Misión Boston* main church it is not uncommon to see women who start dancing, jumping, screaming and spinning in a sufi-like fashion. This congregation provides people with spaces and occasions in which their emotions can be stirred and transacted. Through these experiences the self's corporeal dimension is stretched up to an unthinkable limit, as it sometimes happen in illness and in other moments of suffering. Approved sensational forms work with and through materiality, exalting what's been humiliated in other life domains.

In the controlled space of the church, bodily porousness is experienced as positive. Its malleability—that which also makes it vulnerable—becomes the condition for the Spirit's manifestation. Human body is a conduit, some *hermanos* tried to explain to me. If human "inner" space is not filled with the Spirit, other, malevolent, cosmic forces colonize it and turn it into their realm or into a battlefield. The body-self must be nurtured, disciplined, cultivated, purged and, paradoxically, individualized, made immune to other influences and allegiances, in order to be permeable to God's presence. Human caving in—a spontaneous relinquishment of control for which the body-self must be trained—means that the Spirit's work has become possible and that this can manifests itself in the material world of perceptions, of sensations, of ceremonial practices (dancing, singing, praying, healing), giving rise to a "communitas" (Turner, 2012) of flesh and spirit.

Ronnie's story

Ronnie was the only son of Alfredo, a solitary man in his sixties or seventies who always seemed to come from the *monte* or to be shuffling towards it with his donkey. He was born in Maicao, in the Guajira. His father used to travel frequently, like other villagers, to that town, when trade and smuggling were still prosperous and the Guajira was the gateway to the rest of the Caribbean. In Maicao, Alfredo met Ronnie's mother. When the couple split up, Ronnie stayed with his mother. Later, when this had another child and felt she could not take care of Ronnie anymore she decided to travel to Barú and leave the child with his father. During one of our short trips to a wealthy landowner's *finca* he told me about the day he arrived to Barú. "In the time of mangos I was brought here", he said. When we recorded his story it was May again and mangos were everywhere, filling the air with their sweet smell.

One day he woke up and his mother had left, he said. His aunts helped for a while. One would look after him. But he felt she was not that happy about his presence there, although she continued to care for him. He thought that she had felt threatened. Andrés' presence in the village meant that he had a right to decide about the destiny of some family land. About another one of his aunts Ronnie only said that she used the dark arts of magic. "She tried to kill me", he said, referring to an oneiric experience but nevertheless certain of his relative's intention.

Ronnie worked through his teen-age years. Then he began selling lottery tickets. He managed to save some money and he rented a small kiosk near the harbor. He started selling small items, soft drinks, and other kind of provisions. Later he got another shop, until business started to wane. His shop was ransacked three times. These thefts caused him considerable economic problems. In order to avoid other accidents, he would sleep every night inside his stuffy and sultry shop. At home the situation was not better. His father had to watch closely what was left of his *monte*, which some people claimed as theirs. They had tried to take off the fences delimiting the property. In Ronnie's opinion the culprits were being backed by powerful persons, who wanted to get hold of that land.

Sometime before my arrival Ronnie had hired a woman, a single mother with two kids, to help with house duties. He and the woman soon initiated a relationship but people started gossiping about the women's whereabouts while Ronnie was working. He felt that in order to retain his pride and reputation he had to end the relationship. He attributed this turn to people's malevolence. People had got in between and harmed his relationship through witchcraft. A peculiar individual, whom I have never seen but I have, on Ronnie's insistence, briefly spoken with on the phone, had played an important role in his recent life. Or, at least, it did play it in his story. He was a Chocoano who lived near San Onofre, in the department of Sucre, a zone, like Chocó itself, associated with magical practice. Sometimes Ronnie talked about him as skillful herbalist and was careful to minimize his proficiency in the magical arts. Other times he emphasized his abilities as a *brujo* and claimed that it was better for anyone to have him on one's side. This man found for Ronnie a girl who could help him with his shop and with house chores.

The girl was young and she had been already mistreated by a hard life. Everything seemed to go well, between and Ronnie and her. He told me he had felt loved and cared for and that he had felt he could be useful and kind to the girl. Then, again, something went wrong. The girl went back to her village for Christmas, promising she would come back soon, but she never did. At the beginning of my fieldwork he was still hoping she would come back, although, so the rumors went, she was already living with another man, a "Christian" man.

"...So I felt confused...I felt depressed...I was looking for something. In that moment I started learning occult things, but that didn't bring me anything good either. Because after the girls I had, the first and the second, I tried to do those things to take revenge on women."

Ronnie started to learn with some individuals who claimed they knew about magic. His efforts, though, did not result in any positive change. He came to think that a man, his main teacher, was preventing him from accessing valuable knowledge, which would make Ronnie a rival in both business and sexual matters. According to Ronnie some men who *know* used to blackmail their female clients, by threatening to spread details about their intimate life and thus forcing them to accept them as sexual partners. His mentor, on the contrary, attributed the scarce results Ronnie obtained to other people's magical skills, so powerful or so timely administered, that any possibility of wresting Ronnie's former partner from her new life was meant to fail or, even worse, to have unforeseen, negative consequences.

"Nowadays we all in Barú want to have women that way, because I myself wanted. With magic. With dirty things. So that it is easier. She (a woman) cannot say no...*Brujería* has waned a lot but in Barú everybody knows things, everybody goes and look for such person (a person who knows), the one I told you about, or they go to Cartagena...There are some her...When she (the second girl) went away I got really depressed. What I did was going after *brujas* and *brujerías*, to make her come back through sorcery (*a las malas*) but it didn't work. A. didn't want to help me. O. didn't want to help, P. wouldn't either. Because they had told me that she had been heavily charmed (*se la habian echado muy dificil*)...she had another mentality, she had a more aggressive mentality. She would come back with a way of ordering about, I mean I wouldn't have here the same person I had before. They said: I can't help you because I know I can bring her back here but you will live with more mortification."

If Ronnie had persisted (even the man from Chocó warned him) there was a serious risk that the girl would indeed come back, but that she would not be the same person she used to. She would be "different". The grateful, submissive girl Ronnie was used to would come back as a woman who wanted to boss him around. Ronnie had been upset by women. He would sometimes go to Cartagena and pay for a girl's company, he

often told me, as if to show (people? me? himself?) he was really capable of doing what other men commonly did. He would “collaborate” (*colaborar*) with some money, as some men used to do, even in the village. But he slowly realized that he was looking for a more stable relationship and even more so after starting attending the church. He had also felt that some women, in Barú, had taken advantage of him. They had asked for economic help, either money or goods, insinuating they could be potential lovers but failed to show him even gratitude or friendship. His change had not been abrupt, though, but gradual, as its exploration of various religious alternatives and its involvement with one particular denomination.

At some point I had the feeling that perhaps I was one more in the list of women from whom Ronnie had felt betrayed. When he started attending Pastor Julio’s church he invited me to participate in some of the activities. Although I accepted I never went. I sensed, but perhaps too late, that he had felt deceived. When I asked him if he resented my behavior he said that he was accustomed to women’s unfulfilled promises.

The local game of asking, giving and receiving, between men and women, is a subtle and devious one. I myself got entangled in it, perhaps thinking I was playing according to my own, different, rules. I received small presents and I occasionally bought others. For instance when I once went to Bogotá’s book fair, I bought a Bible for Ronnie. Sometime after I came back from the Capital he gave me as a present a small colorful towel and a hairband, of the kind his former partner liked, he told me. It is possible that some people interpreted these small exchanges through their own criteria, and expressed judgments I could sometimes sense but did not completely decipher, or that I chose to ignore. Once I gave one of the biscuits Ronnie sometimes offered me while chatting over a coffee to a girl I used to spend time with during my first months in Barú. I had eaten some and found them good enough but as the girl bit into the one I gave her she immediately spat out the few crumbs she had taken. It was *malo* (bad), she declared, using a simple word that was also wide enough to signal a decay brought about by faulty material elaboration and inaccurate storage and another kind of “corruption”, effected through evil intentions and arts. Her mother, a devote Christian, presided, frowning, over the scene but did not try the biscuit. I had to trust her, she proclaimed, though. She *knew* when something was “bad”.

Had I started to be seen as a target of magical influences? Perhaps it was just a coincidence. After all, the same woman, and in this she did not differ from non-Pentecostal villagers, or from Cartageneros, had often warned me not to accept food or drinks from *any* person. She also used to tell me that in Barú “you cannot have friends of the opposite sex”. Any male close friend would be immediately seen as your *marido*. And it was known that in order to conquer a reluctant prospective *marido* or *mujer* magical arts were used. Was Ronnie trying to show his affection, as a friend, by “paying back” my Bible or the item I would occasionally fetch for him in Cartagena’s supermarkets with things that his former relationships had taught him women would appreciate? Some young men started hinting at the fact that we were talking a lot together. I think he felt amused by these insinuations but I would get particularly annoyed when someone screamed or murmured to him “*evangelico corrupto*”, an expression that it is used to mock Pentecostals and to indicate their alleged hypocrisy. People obviously knew that he had been acquainted with men who *knew* about witchcraft.

Then, things had started to change. I sensed that although Ronnie was willing to help and often proposed to go for a walk he sometimes felt uncomfortable to be alone with me, in the *monte*. I tried to keep my distance, getting more self-conscious, but I felt that our relationship had lost spontaneity. He had always told me chunks of stories he had heard, stories about *brujas* and *brujerías*, although often accompanied by an advice: I

should give up delving into those issues or someday “they” would take revenge on me. He also had given me the photocopy of a Venezuelan book of magic that he had got when he was trying to learn. Now he didn’t want to talk about “those things” anymore. He said he had had to choose between God and the Devil as he couldn’t live with both.

Ronnie sometimes commented upon his past affairs and remarked that the *ayunos* (fasting ceremonies) he was participating in at dawn could give men strength to resist sexual impulses. As the body is fed everyday through daily meals, he explained, the spirit must be fed through the spiritual goods God sends. This feeding of the spirit took place through the deferment of physical satisfaction, especially through fastening. Feeding the spirit caused the body to lose superfluous material, he had been told. The *ayunos* made people lose weight while strengthening and nurturing the spirit, which, empowered, could thus resist other kinds of “hunger^{xxxvii}”. Little by little, I noticed that some people started telling me that Ronnie wanted to “move on” (*salir adelante*), that it was visible that he wanted to “progress” (*progresar*). He didn’t squander his money partying and drinking, he spent his time working. He was “serious” (*serio*).

Before I went away Ronnie gave me another present, not a waistband or sweets, like he had done previously, but a confession that left me wondering about the role we play while thinking we are the ones who are looking for answers and experimenting with people’s stories. He told me that the first time he had accompanied me to the *monte* he had done it as a kind of test: to see if he could resist the temptation of spending time with a woman without trying to seduce her. He had always heard that women and men could never be friends, he said, but he had discovered it was not true. I took his words as some kind of sober, yet affectionate, declaration of esteem.

Pentecostalism and masculinity

Ronnie’s story is particularly interesting as it is the story of an ongoing conversion and thus what makes Pentecostalism attractive to many male islanders stands out more clearly in his narration. Pentecostalism provides an alternative way of embodying and performing masculinity. Ronnie got caught between cultural expectations prescribing certain ways of embodying and performing masculinity (as well as certain ideas prescribing what a man should or should not emotionally experience) and what he had been able to attain and maintain in his life. In Barú social memories about powerful individuals wove together successful business, money and sexual prowess (and, often, magic). The social relationships within which Baruleros and Cartageneros had been enmeshed in from the colony onward had molded local hegemonic masculinity as a set of dispositions and feelings where reputation was obtained through the accumulation and display of women and other commodities and by men’s active participation in an all-male public space where men’s virility was usually weighed and recognized along the same criteria. Different “byroads” have always been available to local men to partially or temporarily retreat from the social spaces in which their peers might judge them and comment upon their behavior. Pentecostalism opened up opportunities for those who came to feel dissonance between social expectations and emotions.

Within Pentecostal churches men are ascribed a natural kind of authority and of leadership that bypasses economic success but also evokes it through the management of a respectable and committed selfhood. Ronnie gave up the chance of being seen with girls from the village, his trips to Cartagena’s discos, and occasionally faced his peers’ critiques, but he acquired the right to withdraw from other, more frequent and more direct, confrontations and to live a wider range of emotional and bodily experiences.

When Ronnie started going more frequently to the church he would rehearse for me the biblical story of Jacob, who had wanted to marry Laban’s young daughter but was

given as a wife, after seven years of hard work, her sister. He had to work hard for Laban for seven more years in order to marry both Rachel and Leah. This story appealed to Ronnie: it was a promise of economic and sentimental success after sustained effort and hardships. Ronnie also found a spiritual guide and a counselor, Pastor Julio, who embodied the switch from local dominant to alternative masculinity. The pastor himself had experienced in the past a crisis in which he felt some of the women he had had relationships with had harmed him through witchcraft. He had subsequently converted to Pentecostalism and rebuilt his family life. Pastor Julio helped Ronnie with different matters. He was the one who literally dragged him out of his depression, by knocking on the door of the kiosk that Ronnie seldom left, every morning, and by bringing him to the *ayunos*. He was the one who suggested him certain readings, who helped him to understand what was happening to him and guided him through the stages of his gradual incorporation into the new community. He had even given Ronnie economic and financial advice. Ronnie's friendship with Pastor Julio offered him the chance to recognize the charismatic (and thus potentially accessible to everyone and not based on historical or economic privilege) authority of a young man with whom he could identify.

Pentecostal investments

Ronnie was especially keen to learn how to combine his spiritual longings with successful business techniques. His "investment" in a way of life and in a new identity also had economic dimensions. Various authors noted that global third-wave Pentecostalism is also shaped by prominent ideas of economic transactions between God and his congregation. I often heard, in several churches, that individuals who contributed financially to the enlargement and sustenance of God's "company" would be rewarded with nine times more what they have given. "Investing" in God's company meant investing in God's support and in a new community, allegedly backed by divine forces. A person who contributes economically and participates in the administration of God's enterprise becomes a sort of shareholder, entitled to enjoy the benefits of God's success. It is clear that Pentecostal practice features issues of risk-taking, expected rewards and intentionality (Coleman, 2011). Commitment to personal change, evangelization (working for God) and economic contribution to one's church can be seen as attempts to "bind God by a contract" (Hubert and Mauss, 1964). Moreover, Pentecostalism can provide people with the opportunity to (re)create and strengthen relationships marked by hierarchy, obligations and ambitions, especially in contexts in which "traditional" relations based on fictitious and sociobiological kinship or patronage have lost its strength or in which market-based relationships have transformed the social landscape, making it more difficult to navigate.

Ambiguities of conversion processes

Ronnie's involvement with the Church was gradual. At the beginning of my fieldwork he would still listening to Charismatic Catholic radio Esperanza. He tried different options. He searched for information. He listened to other people, to rumors about villagers attending various congregations. He read the Bible, watched Christian videos. People, when looking back and talking about their conversion, often mentioned specific episodes, moments, periods of their life, "crises" that divided life into a "before" and an "after". Few individuals, though, failed to acknowledge that their commitment had been gradual and had often followed a tortuous road. Francisca, for instance, had, in the past, often called the pastor when she needed support but for a long time she had not wanted to be baptized.

Most authors have tended to describe the ruptures between past and present in stark terms, as “world-breaking” (Robbins, 2004), “transformation” (Martin, 1990), “discontinuity” (Burdick in Robbins, 2004), “break with the past” (Gill in Robbins, 2004), but we also need to deal with the ambiguities, negotiations and compromises of conversion. I have seen, more in Barú than in Ararca, and especially in the IPUC, that behaviors and attitudes which are not considered appropriate for Christians can be for some time tolerated, mainly through the avoidance of certain issues, and by failing to produce social commentaries about particular events. It was also understood that people change “little by little” and must not be forced to see themselves or to act as *evangélicos* before the right time. Relatives of people who are involved with the church similarly occupied ambivalent positions. They often showed respect to the pastor and his family members, worked for them or helped them with various chores, participated to religious cults or other church activities but avoided taking the decision to get baptized and thus be formally incorporated into the new community.

Pentecostalism has devices that allow people to accommodate the ambivalent, interstitial position of some of its members. Two expressions were emblematic of these winding routes to conversion and belonging: *estar en la promesa* and *apartarse*. Mateo, an evangelical Barulero, told me that since his grandparents had been Christians and had often brought him to the church when he was a child he had been *en la promesa* since he was a kid. His grandparents’ love and their allegiance to God’s community had provided him with roots he had been able to reclaim and to hang on to when he had “hit the bottom”, as he described the crisis that initiated his involvement with evangelism. Being *en la promesa* is very different from *nacer en el Evangelio*, (being born in the Gospel), said of children who are raised within Pentecostal community. Of such kids was often said that they were not mature enough to take responsible decisions and that their parents’ obstinacy accounted for their weak faith and for the breaking of community rules. Some *hermanos* claimed that teenagers should be left to enjoy their life and not pressured to act like Christian adults. *Estar en la promesa* constituted some kind of inheritance, a credit which could be claimed, something done by parents and ancestors, and by God through them. Similarly, *apartarse* meant moving aside, stepping aside without getting out of the community. It was generally said of persons who had neglected the church for some time and especially of those who had retreated back to some of the customs of their pre-conversion life. “Moving aside” could occasionally lead to involvement with another Christian church, considered more suitable for one’s needs, but it always entailed the possibility to retrace one’s steps and to go back to one’s “roots”.

Pentecostalism is, indeed, connected with ideas of movement and mobility at various levels. For evangelicals conversion is akin to “moving on”, improving one’s life and one’s community. It is an educational and civilizing enterprise. And Pentecostal proselytism works through mobility, through journeys and missions, campaigns and attempts to interact and engage with extra-local groups and ideas. Insofar as it contributes to shape and transform world visions, values and attitudes towards family life, gender, social relations, and community, Pentecostalism can be considered as a particular kind of massive social movement. The direction towards which this “movement” advances or the goals it allegedly aspires to attain are more ambiguous issues. Pentecostalism juggles with various representations of the past and matches them with present concerns and depictions of possible and desirable, or dystopian and apocalyptic futures. Its rituals and ceremonies feature the same space and time compression which magic precipitates. As we will see in the final section of this thesis, the ambiguity of Pentecostal movement leaves space for a variety of outcomes, contradictory social changes and conflicting community responses.

CHAPTER 4. *Brujería*, Popular Catholicism and the Island's Phantasmagorical Space

Yo puedo permanecer por siglos a los pies de la sed y no morir. Yo puedo tomar el amable rostro, la irreplicable figura de tu amada y me seguirías hasta las rayas del destino final. Yo puedo meter mis manos a la hoguera y no las daña. Yo puedo levantar con mis manos pequeñas una montaña, con un soplo sereno secar un río, las espinas se niegan a herir mi santa piel. Teme la centella a mi presencia. Amanso con mi mirada de gacela a la indomable mapaná. El jaguar huye a mi paso. Pero no existe dicha completa. Por eso mi padre rapta humanos en verano, quiere levantar una estirpe que jamás perezca, porque la sal nos derrite el paladar, el corazón, toda la piel.

“*Palabras de una mohana*”, Uriel Cassiani Pérez

Introduction

Brujería is in itself a liminal category. It combines popular spirituality with dominant doctrines, historical events and characters with imagination and emotions. It blends various facets of power, temporalities, times and places, creating hybrid “compromising formations” (Ginzburg, 2008). It reproduces the controversial divide between religion and magic, only to reinstate the ambiguity of such categorizations and to suggest the existence of a long history behind them. It encompasses practice and storytelling, “knowing”, “being”, and “doing” (Escobar, 2008). It is alimented by and replenishes further a variegated, bizarre, “phantasmagorical space”(Kapferer, 2002), which combines the African, the indigenous, the popular and the learned European, the animal, the human, the earthly and the saintly. It buttresses power structures and dominant values while insinuating subversion. It creates fissures through which other ways of knowing, experiencing and narrating the world can be ventilated, stored and reproduced.

Local *Brujería* was shaped by historical contacts and movements. Its origins are related to crucial historical transition, to disruption, to the scandal of unacknowledged suffering and that of mystified, untold, half-forgotten revolt. The very etymology of the word “periphery”(peri + pherein: carry/move around) proves useful when reflecting on the marginal and the peripheral mutually shaping each other, but is also suggestive of the role the “marginal” plays in alimenting and infusing life into the central.

Brujería deals with interstitial sociality, with its concerns, ambiguities and possibilities. It helps to give shape to contradictory, fragmented, polyphonic regimes of memory. It constructs local Afro-Colombian historical experience by deploying

“ordering” narratives which set apart dangerous and appropriate sociality, generate distance and create connections between individuals, families and social groups, humans and non-human entities. Paradoxically, it does the same —making identity and place, questioning and recreating intimacy and personhood —through a plethora of “dis-ordering” narratives in which people’s experiential world continually escapes dominant explanatory frames and linear, superficial socio-historical representations.

Stumbling across falling witches

In the villages scattered around the Bay of Cartagena some women know how to fly. They have learnt powerful words, secret words, which, in the night, allow them to fly above villages and towns, marshes and hills. While they fly towards distant places, other women, who, like them have been taught how to discard clothes and skins in order to rise from the earth, race towards the Island. Women coming from different places sometimes gather in the Playón of Barú, before the village turns into *monte*, in the Playón of Ararca, in the hill rising on the back of Emilia’s house, or on the Hill of the Monkeys, named after creatures that a long time ago, when the island wasn’t an island, crowded the bush. There, and anywhere else they fancy going, they dance and sing their *fandangos*. They sing in their “own language”, a language that nobody understands. They sing about their “happiness”, about how pleasurable is to be a *bruja*— as that is how such women are called by those who cannot join them— and they sing for their dead, on their graves and to their spirits. Sometimes, the elders say, they sing and dance for the Devil himself, with whom they have a bizarre, although intimate, relation. Many villagers have been lured by their music, drawn from bed by their *bullerengues*, but I have never known a person who was able to find the place from which the clapping, the drumming and the singing had been poured into the night.

Brujas, when they are not partying and sweeping across the Dique Channel and back, take enormous pleasure in changing their naked bodies, their skinless skin, and the breasts they need to fly, as no flat-bosomed human, except priests, can ride the currents which jostle above human villages, into animals and unanimated objects. They turn into donkeys, hens, sows, dogs, into *sábalos* (shads), into snakes and insects. For as long as the elders can remember, the eldest witches have taught young women, who, once, knew how to show “respect” and how to keep secrets.

Some women, though, have forgotten how to fly. “*Las hechicerías son distintas*,” I was warned. Distinct categories of *brujas* are supposed to exist. Some limit their activities to spying other people from walls and windows. They are not visible but they do listen and they rejoice in spreading gossip about a household’s secrets. They are called *pareleras*. Other women, the *hechiceras* (sorcerers) are capable of sucking out a baby’s life, through his navel, his nostrils, his mouth, taking the shape of a thin, almost

invisible chord that resembles a spider's thread. From any tiny hole in the ubiquitous corrugated-iron roofs they unwind down into the visible openings of a baby's body. When they devote their time to these hideous practices they are also said to be *brujas de hilo* ("thread" witches).

But, even for a *bruja*, dangers are lurking in the alleys and narrow streets of any village. Any wary islander, any frightened man, not to mention those who can sense the wonders of a world which keep on defining as "normal" and terrifying at the same time, know that *brujas* can crash to the ground due to unforeseeable obstacles. A well-remembered "Creed" (*Credo*) can have them tumbling down to the earth, should they ever experience the bad luck of passing by while the prayer is being told. If *brujas* realize, as they always seem to do, that they have been "caught" within the words of a prayer which were not been uttered to draw them down, they themselves show the unfortunate spectators how they can be "released" (*soltar*). But if they know they have been caught on purpose (*por sinvergüenza*) the shameless culprit will, sooner or later, be punished. In Barú fishermen and experienced seamen have drowned in shallow ponds that before the rains didn't even exist. Men who had spent all their lives into the *monte* have found themselves entrapped within knots of overgrown vegetation, until rescue came from those who had a hint that the disappeared *knew* too much or had done things that other *knowledgeable* villagers never forget.

Those who *know* how to catch *brujas* are called *zánganos*. They trap them because they have been disturbed by their brays or their howls, by their clucking and their chirping, by their whistling and their laughing, which they perceive as a direct, personal provocation. They catch them because the *zángano* is a *bruja's* "boss" (*jefe*), her teacher, her *marido* and she has to "respect" him. It is said, or, better, it is whispered, that *zánganos* also want to have sexual relationships with *brujas* but that it is better to "win them over" (*enamorarlas legalmente*) as experienced men usually are able to do and avoid being condemned to a punishment which sooner or later would be doled out.

Zánganos haul *brujas* down and tie them up with words and using special ropes, *hilos de puerco biche*, by flinging their hat into the air and ensuring it falls to the ground upturned or through other "secrets" (*secretos*). They are said to perform many other wonders. They can stretch up to reach the highest palms and frighten people who realize what they have thought were trunks, are actually the giant legs of a sniggering *zángano*. They move so fast that it is impossible to keep their pace. With a single step they go from Ararca to Barú and they use other tricks to ease their load of work, minimize effort and outwit enemies. As you hear more and more about their doings and their goings it becomes clear that their relationships with the others who *know* and with those who do not seem to know but who are frightened by magic, is fraught with dangers and contradictions.

The *monte*, the villages, in certain moments, and especially the roads and paths leading from one to the others, crawl with entities that people call *aparatos*. *Aparatos* are the result of *bruja*s' and *zánganos*' transformations and also part of other shifty, ambiguous entities whose differences are often blurred. Solitary legs hopping about, *mohanes*^{xxxviii} whose physical and moral flexibility undermines the apparent solidity of personhood and of identity, invisible wailing babies and dwarfs inhabit the *monte* but are also said to come down to the villages.

They belong to the past but they have survived into an uncertain present. They are "normal" ("just like me and you", people say, either with a mysterious smile or a grave look) but they are also "made", evoked, almost fabricated- as crafty individuals "make" *aparatos*. They are alien, "other", but their otherness is a possibility (and a threat) for anyone who is willing to acknowledge that other things (*lo otro*) exist, beside and within those which are taken for granted. Entering into intimate, reciprocal relations with *lo otro* is possible, with the help of those who have learnt before, either by joining them and listening to them, or by having access to the books that give shape, order and preserve magic. Those who *know* (*los que saben*) about the invisible things which can exceptionally materialize or perspire into the "visible", call the numinous beings they perceive and interact with *visiones* ("visions"). They are usually elderly, experienced, villagers. Some were said to "work" with the Saints or with the Devil.

Witchcraft as popular religion: representations and interpretations

When Manuel, a member of Pasacaballos community council, brought me to Ararca and to Santa Ana for the first time, he introduced me to an old friend of his, who worked at the local *Casa del Adulto Mayor* (OlderAdult's House). Manuel told his friend that I was interested in knowing stories about *brujería*. The man seemed embarrassed. He said that "those things" had happened in the past, when there was no electricity in the island. To me, then, his was a way of telling me that people in the island had been already "illuminated", that the electric wires had dispelled different sorts of shadows and that it would have been impolite to insist on my questions. Other people, in Cartagena, had already told me that mine could be a fruitless quest. *Brujería*, or magic, always seemed to be somewhere else. They always seemed to be someone else's patrimony. My amateurish, direct questions were inevitably, if awkwardly, deflected towards other physical and social territories. Magic bounced back from the places where it was supposed to thrive. It bounced back to me, as I kept on asking and, later, as I realized that asking was akin to knowing and evoking. *Brujería* had become an endless game of reflections and projections and I felt utterly discouraged. I thought people were telling me that I was wrong to look for obsolete practices and that I was probably suffering from a so far undiagnosed form of "Orientalism". People, in changing topics during conversations, in showing perplexity when confronted with the issue or in abandoning me in supposedly concerted places of meeting were simply telling me I should not focus on *brujeria*. Perhaps they were truly meaning this, but for reasons that were different from what I had thought. That first encounter in Santa Ana already contained allusions to the past and a

dominant narrative about the present. It contained fissures, the space of maneuver of double consciousness, of the “split-voice” (hegemonic and subversive, a voice which insinuates doubts as it represents the norm, Segato, 2007) which some consider a characteristic of the Afro popular world in the Americas. People *knew* and didn’t. Some probably thought I did *know*, for instance, that electric illumination, as we will see, had chased away *brujas* in more literal ways.

My fieldwork had already started, although I kept considering my notes as a preamble to the “real thing”. And *Brujería* meant different things for distinct people. For some looking after a saint’s statue constituted *brujería* while for others meant being a devout catholic. For some villagers knowing about herbs or even knowing stories of past wonders meant being *sabidos*, for others it was about “tradition” and “little tricks”. What islanders told or omitted or the words they chose also reflected the kind of encounter they felt they were having with their interlocutor. And different people placed borders and defined current or past stories and practices in different terms.

The debate about the homologies and differences between religion and magic is an old one within social sciences. Authors like Tylor (1871) and Frazer (1890) ascribed magic to lowly societies and religion and science to the more advanced ones. Within modern (read Euro-American) societies magic was the realm of the lower categories of individuals, those who were not completely rational, mainly the popular classes, and women. Durkheim (1996) thought that magic was divisive and conflictive while religion increased people’s sense of communality and solidarity. Even Malinowski (in Magliocco, 2004), who underscored magic’s association with prestige and social status in particular settings, its instrumental utility and its transformative role, maintained the division between magic and religion and hierarchically ordered them. Evans-Pritchard (1976) was, at the beginning of 20th century, an exception, when he argued that both realms, the “religious” and the “magical” weren’t so easy to disentangle, in various societies.

Successively, the work of historians whose researches bordered with anthropology dealt with the role of hegemonic social institutions. Power entered the debates. Without considering power relations and specific projects of creation of (not exclusively)religious subjectivities it is difficult to make sense of alternative religious practices and even less of the neglect, dismissal or persecution to which they have been subjected. Scholars like Behar(1987), Messana(2007), Ginzburg(2008), Wilby(2006;2010), Magliocco(2004), De Mello e Souza(2004), Gaffin(2012), Navarrete(1995;2005) or Maya (1998), examining and (re-) narrating historical perceptions and experiences of the wondrous in Europe and in the Americas have argued that a variety of alternative magical/religious/medical practices, usually syncretized with popular Catholicism, had the characteristics of counter-hegemonic *systems*. In various historical moments and geographical spaces definitions of “magic” and “religion” and the distinctions between the two categories have shifted. Priests and nuns have been tried for possessing grimoires and countryside *curanderas* have used catholic prayers in their healing rituals, in Europe and in the Americas. Official authorities, religious and secular ones, have usually controlled definitions and sought to retain control over the “manipulation of the supernatural” (Messana, 2007).

In colonial Latin America, magic, as a set of alternative modes for accessing, manipulating, understanding and narrating the invisible, the transcendent and the numinous “ran parallel to the belief system of the Church” (Behar, 1987: 48). It dynamically interacted with official religion and took from it many of its symbols and practices. It also, though, appropriated and subverted its power and its hierarchies. It often expressed alternative values and worldviews.

In the Americas popular religious systems were shaped by social and epistemological encounters between African, Indigenous and popular European practices and cosmologies (Behar, 1987; De Mello e Souza, 2004), which to a 21st century careful reader and researcher appear inextricably interwoven, and turn resolute propositions about roots and influences into a marshy terrain. Popular magical/ religious systems interacted with and incorporated colonial and dominant ideas about “women”, about the “black”, the “indigenous”, the low *castas*, creating, circulating and reproducing “compromising formations”(Ginzburg, 2008) born out of historical encounters, translations, accommodations, and equivocation. Stories and practices related with wondrous beings and forces which colonial authorities and postcolonial states stigmatized and defined as “witchcraft” also stored knowledge and memories about peoples, places, events, lost or waning practices (Wilby, 2010) and introduced ambiguous and subjective elements within the apparently strictly Manichean moral visions of religious elites (Wilby, 2006).

Popular culture (and especially its ritual, magical religious elements) turned into “folklore” in the nineteenth century. Folklore preserved and gave a positive value to the imaginaries, and the practices which official history had neglected but it often trapped them within ossified categories and made them to represent what was doomed to disappear. This predominantly happened in Europe and in the United States but also in Latin American nation-building contexts. Late twentieth century contributions from Latin American cultural studies reinstated a dynamic and historical dimension into discussions and representations of the “popular”, showing that the “popular” has been shaped by interactions with dominant ideologies and practices, that its contents and borders constantly change, that it is not rooted in remote, backwards territories (Garcia Canclini, 2005) and, above all, that it is a shifting field traversed by social currents, by the work of power. This deconstruction of folklore is something we should keep in mind in a moment in which various economic forces use conventional representation of alleged “folk” traits in order to advertise and sell pre-packaged native identities and landscapes. Even the state, in various Latin American countries and in different moments, as the Venezuelan anthropologist Barreto (1995) argued, has celebrated the indigenous of the past, the brave warriors and the sensual women, while simultaneously repressing and neglecting the living indigenous of its time. In Cartagena women coming from the slums at the footsteps of the Popa Hill dress up as *palenqueras*, and pose for the tourists. *Fandangos*, *cumbia*, and *mapalé* are rehearsed for the visitors. Other, less flowery, less marketable and less condescending, historical experiences and other facets of black people’s sociality are made invisible and repressed.

Local *brujería*

Some authors (see Wirtz, 2004, for instance) whose studies focus on Afro-American religion, wrote about the convenience of considering *brujería*, the cult of the saints and other kinds of popular religiosity as a single religious-magical complex, constituted by practices, images and ideas which developed in geographically and socially related places and continually dialoguing with each other. People, then, in making distinctions, in drawing differences and similarities, add to an historical power-filled conversation. *Brujería* —its multiple practices, its narratives —is also an assemblage of multiple historical voices, each one possessing its emotional tone and its repertoire.

People in Barú and Ararca had different ways of referring to *brujería*. They would talk about *aparatos* (which seems to refer to apparitions but also has a mechanical connotation, implies expert fabrication). They said *lo otro* (the “other thing”), or *hechicería* (more negative term, concerned with evil, although dealing with evil is

necessary to combat evil). They used various euphemisms. They used well-placed silences. Ambiguity and secrecy were essential component of stories about *brujería*.

Brujería is a product of historical syncretism. It simultaneously hides and reveals, like in a game of prestidigitation. It created, circulated and preserved memories of peoples, knowledge, places, interactions, and movements. It recombines, assembles and translates. It shows the complexity of roots, the layered composition of selves and places and the historical ubiquity of contact and confrontation.

Brujería can be seen as a form of resistance. It has probably, at least in part, constituted a more overt form of resistance in the past (Navarrete, 1995; 2005; Maya, 1998; Federici, 2004). It has promoted, and still partially encourages oppositional stances and preserved the “radical openness” (hooks, 1990), the space of freedom and interrogation, of manoeuvre and transformation, which social and historical marginality can offer.

Brujería nourishes a huge part of the local “phantasmagorical space” (Kapferer, 2002), the space of the strange, of the weird, of dreams, imagination, of the shifty border between trivial and wondrous. The “phantasmagorical space” is the space of shape-shifting. It is the space of the journey and of the return. It is a physical multi-territory but it goes beyond materiality. Like magic itself, it is the terrain of simultaneous time and space compression (Dilley, 2004). It intersects with all the other territories which shaped the Island’s trans-territorial practices. It’s, indeed, the imaginary and spiritual counterpart of these practices.

“That still exists”: time, memory and narratives of magical encounters

In order to understand stories about *brujería* and to reflect about its origins and functions, it is necessary to deal with some essential studies of colonial magic. Through the examination of documents produced by the local Inquisition Tribunal, Navarrete (1995; 2005) and Maya Restrepo (1998) have conjured a Cartagena where magic’s experts performed practices marked by the “African”, the “popular European”, the “indigenous”, but above all by the “mestizo”, the “creole”, the syncretic. *Juntas*, the gatherings or covens of *brujas* that the inquisitors examined through the lenses of the learned European image of the Sabbah (Ginzburg, 2008), are revealed by these researchers’ historical reconstruction as spaces for celebrating, for mourning and for remembering, as sites of (re) socialization and contestation and interaction.

The documents of the trials to which, for instance, Paula de Eguiluz was subjected, show that this *mulata* born in La Hispaniola (current Haiti-Dominican Republic), had traveled the Caribbean, before ending up in Cartagena, where she brought a knowledge which blended notions and practices from a variety of Caribbean contexts, and where she taught and practiced the “*arte del bien querer*”, through which masters, husbands and other bullies could be subdued. Although the Inquisition tried her twice, she was a highly respected woman who had among her clients the local bishop, who as a *madrina*, presided over white *brujas’ cuadrillas* (groups) and who introduced new persons to the *juntas*. Like nowadays *zánganos* she was accused of moving incredibly fast and she had claimed to have an “indigenous-looking” dwarf as magical helper (Navarrete, 1995; 2005; Maya, 1998).

Diego López, a mulatto healer involved in the same trial, displayed towards Paula de Eguiluz and towards Elena de Viloría, the *madrina* of the free black women’s *cuadrillas* of 1630s Cartagena, a mix of complicity and rivalry, which reminds us of ambiguous relationships between *brujas* and *zánganos* in village narratives (*ibid.*). There are other similarities: Antonio Congo was accused of “walking” in the night, talking to

animals and plants like Víctor Vives was described as doing in Ararca. Anton Carabalí was said to “catch” familiars and divine the location of *brujas*, as current men who “know” do. Antonio Salinas, free black fisherman, had learnt prayers to work better with his nets and other divining practices from the indigenous people of “Nicaragua” and “Guatemala” (Maya, 1998), as living and deceased Baruleros are said to have learnt from a host of neighboring, distant, historical and fantasized *indios*. By looking at these documents we understand that current *brujería* is part of an ancient and highly resilient system which was for centuries of the utmost importance in the lives of popular classes.

One thing all islanders, at first, seemed to agree upon, was that *brujería* pertained to the past. All the negative connotations of magic, it often seemed to me, were displaced into the blurry region defined as *antes*. That was “before”. “Before” Barú was *tremendo* (terrible, amazing). Nights were scary. People were terrorized by sounds, shadows, strange movements. The past which people recreated through stories —mainly bits of life-stories, personal or familiar experiences and anecdotes set in the Island and abroad — functioned as a device for representing identity, place, contact and belonging. The past itself emerged out of dialogues and narratives, as some kind of quasi-place, lost or hidden somewhere, in a secluded corner of the *monte*. Discourses about the past referred to things, spots and occasions which often had transpired into the present but had been transformed by it. The past allowed an alternative present to take shape.

Narratives about *brujería* were devices through which memory was stored and retrieved. They gave agency to people who in official historical accounts are invisible. Through stories of village *brujas* and *zánganos* and of people who *knew* coming from other towns and regions, experiences that would never amount to “history” were turned into collective memory. People who spent their lives cooking, fishing, sailing, cultivating the land, had wondrous adventures and could do incredible or frightening things. In the Island there had been healers, midwives and people who could talk trees and animals into working for them. La Pita could divine when the dead had been buried in the wrong way and went around the village screaming that she was starting to feel the irresistible urge to eat them. Roberto Moreno faced and tamed the notoriously corrupt and racist Venezuelan police with his “little tricks”. Víctor Vives talked to the animals and to the trees and had undergone a terrifying initiation in the *monte*. José Francisco inadvertently killed his mother while she had taken the shape of an ever-escaping and mocking fish. Other villagers could subdue the wildest cattle or traveled to the islands of Rosario by placing two *totumos* (calabashes) and a gourd full of water on their knees.

After the initial references to a more or less distant past people with whom I tried to discuss *brujería* inevitably lowered their voices and murmured that “that” still existed. Some would refer to an episode or to recent rumors. I had, then, misunderstood the words of the first islander who told me that *brujería* had been banished by electricity. I had given them a metaphorical meaning. A knowledgeable person made me realize my mistake. It was something simpler. People were talking about a spatial change, changes in the territories through which *brujas* moved. These had been in fact forced to spend more time into the *monte*, where they would not smash into electricity poles and would not get caught between antennas.

As progress moved on and vast tracts of land turned into out- of- reach territories the *monte* metamorphosed into a more sinister space. Furthermore many elders had failed to pass down their “inheritance”, their protective *secretos* and most young did not seem interested anymore. What everybody seemed to be keen on was “tying” (*amarrar*) and “taming” (*amansar*). Young women were interested only in learning how to perform

porquerias (dirty things) to tie up men, old Mario thought. There had been *colegios* (schools) for *brujas* in the island, once (and perhaps there still were...). But now it is all about *tiradera* (slang for sexual relationships), Señor Raúl, another person who *knew*, lamented. To him went the tying and tied and those who wanted to know if they had been tied or what could be done to prevent it. And to tie, prevent and tame they all needed magic, but one which didn't involve or entail the freedom of flying or the knowledge of how to summon spirits.

Magic and the wondrous occupied an important place in the rhetorical tension between plenty and scarcity through which islanders represented community and their dwelling within and through connected territories. Some discourses equated the “ancestors”, “the old races” (*las razas antiguas*), or the ancient (*los viejos*) with useful, although ambivalent, knowledge. The *viejos* knew. The *monte* was a site where reciprocal relationships with other beings could unfold. People sometimes expressed the idea that in the past villagers could learn from other persons, from relatives, godparents and from experience. They would hand down local knowledge and what they had learned through walking, sailing and traveling, through encounters with other individuals and social groups. If for some villagers those who came before dealt with devilish things, “didn't know Christ” or were ignorant and superstitious, for others, the young, who had now access to school and many other advantages, despised what they could not use for immediate satisfaction. Representations of the past also were assumptions about the present.

If the past was the site of subversion, the reservoir of adventure, independence and possibilities, these experiences could be accessed and re-appropriated through the circulation of collective memory. The construction of the *Transversal de Barú*, the previous consultations and other events and processes related with development and/or ethnic politics were occasions for retrieving memories and discussing about identity, community and the “other”. In the Mediterranean context studied by Hauschild (2011) people often said that the magic books in which the ancient knowledge was stored were “still there”, hidden somewhere by cautious hands. They couldn't be burnt or destroyed. In the village of Barú, similarly, the magic and the transformative potentialities of the past were still alive. Development-related events materialized, at some spatio-temporal junctions, what had been hidden.

Certain individuals, usually involved in current ethnic politics, had exchanged the “old villagers' tricks” (various villagers defined with this expression old people's magic) for a politically charged “ancestral knowledge” (*conocimientos de nuestros ancestros*). It was an uncommon stance, but one which could become more widespread, despite the growing influence of powerful institutions which dismissed and ridiculed local medical/spiritual notions.

“A man doesn't fly but knows!” gender and magical (dis)encounters

“...My aunt used to walk late in the night and (on a certain night) when she got out she recited the “creed”. And the *bruja* fell on the Creed. (...) it seems that the *bruja* went to see that man (SC), he had a nice *finca*, with plums, with mangoes, he planted them, he had money, so at dawn they went to see him, there were three of them, one from another place and two from this village (he recognized them but nobody else saw them) I was told they were naked. They went to ask the señor to set them free. I cannot, he said. You are the only one who can get us out of this problem, they said. And there is another man, but he lives faraway. I don't know if it was my grandfather. We think that he “knew” but he wouldn't hurt anyone. So that man (SC) searched for something and released them” (LM, Barú, 2012)

“Here, some years ago, we had a problem. A señor from here caught three *brujas*. Among them there was one who had recently given birth. One was from Loricá, they were from there, from those villages, not from here, beautiful women...and among them there was one who had recently given birth. That was the one who begged him to let her go, that her child would die...that woman was fighting! And when he fancied it, he would keep them there, and he’d call all the boys he liked: come here! Because it also happened to me. Get inside that room! He’d keep them there for us (...) But the day he let them go they punished him. And they killed him.” (EV, Barú, 2012)

Señor Enrique and Señora Liduvina weren’t the only ones who related for me stories of *brujas* who stumbled on a well-placed *Credo* or were drawn to the earth by magical words. Dira, in Barú, remembered how her grandfather had caught and imprisoned in his room a *bruja* that had turned into a duck. As it often happens, the *bruja* was a *recien parida*, a woman who had recently given birth. She was a white woman and her breasts were heavy with milk. Other villagers remembered the rumors circulating about *brujas* recently caught in nearby Pasacaballos and Santa Ana and the crowds of villagers running there to see the spectacle. As in Señor Enrique’s narrative, most of the *brujas* who were caught and kept as a punishment inside a house or a shop were said to be beautiful white women with straight hair. “*Bruja con pelo rucho no hay*” (kinky-haired *brujas* do not exist), people told me.

In the first chapter I wrote that the ambiguous relationships that Islanders historically entertained with Indigenous people had strong gender dimensions. *Brujas* who were caught, shamed, and talked about were always *boniticas* (cute) and displayed desirable physical attributes associated with the “indigenous” and with the “whites”: they had long straight hair, sometimes blue or green eyes, “white” skin. It was said that *brujas* needed long hair to cover their faces, because if caught, they wouldn’t want to be recognized. This idea seemed to contradict the stories about the host of black women from the Island and from nearby villages who were said to fly and had supposedly been recognized or caught by those who *knew*.

It is difficult to make sense of such imagery. Lydia Cabrera (1993) described similar beliefs for the 1940s Cuba. And stories about rivalry between female and male magic practitioners are common in the literature about modern or current witchcraft. In local narratives about *brujería* there is, in fact, a constant tension between female and male practice, a tension which is usually expressed in terms of opposition, conflict and, occasionally, in terms of (precarious and ambivalent) collaboration. Among the snapshots offered by archival documents some feature the same tension. The already mentioned “surgeon” Diego Lopez, in Cartagena’s 17th century, despite confessing that his lover and her female friends had introduced him to *brujería* and despite profiting from his magical/medical arts, accused his fellow female practitioners of the crimes the authorities were eager to hear about. The contraposition between female and male practitioners is also present in the stories of Northern Italian Benandanti that Ginzburg (2008) circulated. Contemporary ethnographies of popular magic in European contexts, like Hauschild’s (2011) southern-Italian one, portray similar dynamics: men learning from women and then “conveniently” forgetting about their apprenticeship and contraposition between female and male practice, the latter often represented in a grandiose way, the former trivialized or demonized.

Competition, even between male magicians, was a stable characteristic of magical narratives. *Zánganos* were said to struggle to establish who was more powerful or stronger, who knew more and who was an *embustero* (a fake). Señor Raúl, in Barú, told me about a woman, coming from Venezuela, who had secretly visited him for nine days. They had devoted those days to teaching and learning. When he described his relationship

with the woman he painted it as one of collaboration and rivalry. He ironically observed that the woman had “taken a course” (of *brujería*) three times in Venezuela and had only passed it recently. He claimed he could usually find in his magical book (which he called *El libro infernal*) the information his guest/competitor thought she was the only one to possess. Señor Raúl was also adamant that he could, if in need, promptly receive advice or parcels with rare substances and objects from the Guajira or from Chocó, that he had received books from Venezuela and sent prescriptions relatives in Bogota. He was part of a network of transactions between people who *knew*. Along these circuits mutual support and conflict coexisted.

Female-male conflicts, in the narratives I collected in the field, could take the shape of erotic domination. First of all magical knowledge was strongly associated with sexual prowess, because *brujos* were supposed to have the knowledge necessary to vanquish female resistance and maintain extraordinary sexual performances and secondly because it was said that they could blackmail female clients into consenting to sexual relationships by threatening to spread rumors about their private business. The frequent theme of the capture of *brujas* and their imprisonment in a male practitioner’s house, where, naked and powerless, reduced to pleading (but also, using subterfuges), they had to consent to their capturers’ desires (“He freed her/them when he felt like it”, people often said. The English translation cannot convey the ambiguous meaning of the Spanish version: “*Cuando le dio gusto y gana*”) show that there seem to be a thin line between sexual domination and professional competition.

The kind of knowledge men and women possessed was in itself a source of conflicting interpretations. Who knew more? What kind of knowledge did men and women deal with? Señor Enrique didn’t seem to have doubts. Even my questions about the conflictive relationships between *zánganos* and *brujas* kindled sparks in his eyes and made him raise his voice. Men cannot fly, he conceded, but they *know*. (“*El hombre no vuela pero sabe*”). The *zángano* is often supposed to be a teacher, an authority. According to Miguel, who lived in Ararca, as other individuals who occupy positions of authority, a *zángano* was a “professional” (*un professional*) who apparently taught for free but then wanted to be repaid through sexual favors.

Brujería seemed to be part of a moral code based on a normative view of gender roles: it casts suspicions on female movement, on female talk, on female gatherings and on women’s motives. Women were *malas*, they engaged in *maldades*. They flew because they were *malas* and they were *malas* (bad) because they flew. *Brujería* narratives transposed to the magical/fantastic domain normative ideas about women and their activities. Female unrestricted movement, female talk and female gathering were the target of accusations and rumors in the villages. They had been, not coincidentally, also the target of paramilitary surveillance and repression in many villages of the *Otra Costa*, where women “caught” idly chatting with each other or those who spent time by their houses with other women were made to “sweep the streets” of their villages as a public punishment for their *ociocidad* (indolence). Curiously, *ociocidades* is the expression some villagers use to refer to *brujas*’s activities. Miguel’s grandmother could see and hear *brujas* that were invisible for the rest of her family. She would yell at the roof: “*Brujas ociosas! Vayan a hacer sus oficios!*” (Lazy brujas! Go and tend to your house-chores!)

Ociocidades was also the term Antonio de la Torre Y Miranda, the captain who led the late eighteenth century settlement campaigns in Cartagena’s Province, used when he sought to explain to the authorities and teach the *arrochelados* of the Island why they had to re-settle in newly founded Santa Ana and why it was appropriate for the women to learn weaving and other useful female activities and to spend their time productively (Lucena Giraldo, 1993). Female autonomy, expressed in women’s free use of their time,

female movement, gatherings and other homo-social practices that escaped male and institutional surveillance, were seen as dangerous by colonial authorities. They continued to be stigmatized in nowadays narratives. Being a *mujer de su casa* was still a tenet of hegemonic ideas about femininity for popular classes, especially in small villages. A mototaxi-driver from Barú, who often brought me to Ararca, upon realizing that for several times I hadn't found my landlady, at home, when I got there, suggested that she was acting like a *bruja*. *Brujas* were also said to cheat their husband and leave their bed at night to meet with other women. Husbands did not realize what their wives did while they are sleeping, it was said, because they had been bewitched (*compuestos*).

By the same token, stories of famous *zánganos* featured ideas about a particular kind of local masculinity. They often were a tribute to the adventurous lives of men who had "walked" and sailed or to their experience as knowledgeable farmers, as coal-makers, as fishermen, traders and smugglers. Some of those men had made money, had traveled, had gathered women, children and prestige, had outwitted enemies, and had caught *brujas* coming from distant places. Their activities and attitudes weaved together the themes of adventure, virility^{xxxix}, camaraderie and that curious mix of flirtatiousness, irony and subversion of official hierarchies which in the region is called *mamagallismo* (Wade, 1997).

Stories about *brujería* also transposed to an imaginative plane the sexual and familiar conflicts, usually based on antagonistic sexual/economic transactions, between men and women that pervaded the Island. *Zánganos* thus could be described as the teachers who must be paid back with access to female bodies or as those who checked on *brujas'* feasts, solved conflicts that might arise during similar occasions and in case of serious accidents, brought dead *brujas* back to their villages. The *zángano* in this case embodied and upheld local gender hierarchy and reinforced ideas about female moral lassitude. *Zanganos'* unruliness was an alternative popular class ideal but simultaneously reinforced normative moral stances and dominant gender representations.

Alternative values and forms of resistance in *brujería*

But *brujería* also subverted hegemonic gender ideology. This is true in different ways. It, first of all, reinstated stigmatized female behavior as normal through linguistic ambiguity. *Brujas*, being, as they were, "*malas*", partook of the flexible semantic domain attached to this word. A child, even your own one, can be *malo*, students can make *maldades*, a grandmother, like Miguel's one, can be *malita*. *Malo* could be everything in between "naughty" and "evil". Being *malo* meant being disobedient, acting against official moral codes, gender prescriptions and hierarchies. And *brujas* were "normal" (*gente normal*). This was repeated over and over. Being a *bruja*, being *mala*, was then part of the possibilities entailed in being human. "Common sense" and official voices (within the Self and within communities) rhetorically sanction what is said to be against social laws and what transgresses various kinds of norms, borders and domains but also, more deviously, recast partial subversion as a common, and sometimes desirable or necessary, occurrence.

According to some elderly village women those rumored to be *brujas* in the past weren't "bad" at all. Paulina would dismiss accusations waving her hands. "They weren't *malas*. They only did their own things" (*Hacían sus cosas*). They only wanted to "visit", they wanted to "know" (it was *para visitar, para conocer*). They wanted to have fun, other people said. In order to make fun of people, they would deceive and tease. "*Sera pa' hacer correr a uno!*" (It must be to scare you into running), some women told me when I asked why *brujas* turned into animals or engaged in other puzzling activities. Señora

Gala, who had a neighbor who could turn into a duck, denied that the woman, now deceased, had been *mala*. She was indeed a good person. She would even warn villagers when the dead had been buried upside down. If she had been bad she would have hidden instead of publicly showing her skills.

Miguel reversed linguistic specificity (thus widening the range of female skills) claiming that *zánegas*, female *zánegos*, did exist, contrary to what male villagers usually said. Women could also be professional magicians and *brujas*-catchers. Indeed, his grandmother had been one. Other women sometimes used the word *brujita* to remember a particular person and expressing their affectionate feelings for her. Señora Liduvina remembered that a woman with which she was intimate to the point that she called her “*mamá* Emilia” had been a *brujita*.

Brujería narratives insinuated the existence of a breach between normative ideology and real life experiences. Female wandering was stigmatized but, after all, women did move. Women did travel. Women had always traveled. Women had migrated. They had cleared the *monte* and set up *ranchos*. They had made *rozás* and pathways. They had founded, like Señora Esperanza’s mother, Flora, some of Cartagena’s neighborhoods. *Brujería* hid behind repeated and formulaic motives and cadences alternative values and possibilities. They insinuated that disobedience was and had been possible. The difference between “good” and “evil”, which seemed so clear-cut when people talked to the researcher/ foreigner, usually expressing the authoritative point of view (Smith, 2004), the dominant moral code, softened when some individuals, in non-official occasions, in daily chats, switched to different tones. Blanks for other kinds of interpretations opened up and the complexity of social interactions and the polyphony (Bakhtin, in Smith, 2004) of social narratives could be perceived. These alternative, dissidence-sowing voices made certain, dimmer threads stand out within the mosaic of *brujería*.

First of all *zánegos*, who, in stories of captures of disorderly *brujas*, recall the misogyny and the condemning voices of modern witch-hunting, in other stories embodied black masculine disobedience and unruliness. The *zánego* seemed to have many of the attributes of black American folk heroes (hooks, 2004). *Zánegos* are social transgressors and mythical tricksters. They possessed the qualities and the knowledge and indulged in the activities which modern authorities, secular and religious, wanted to eradicate from the popular classes in order to attain productive, disciplined, predictable workforce (Federici, 2004). They liked travelling. They enjoyed freedom and unrestraint, unsupervised movement. Some, while they were working far away from the village, had met strange and dangerous women who threatened to take them away on a “journey”. Others met and recognized *brujas* while walking to and back from the *monte* or other villages in the night, often coming from the city market (another liminal place usually associated with tricksters) or from a party. *Zánegos* with a single step moved from a village to another (although they often made mistakes and ended up in the subsequent village, the real destination missed by their giant strides).

Men who *knew*, even in other *costeño* provinces (Ocampo, 2007), used magic to avoid hard work, minimize the exploitation of their labor, obtain a *patrón*’s favors, grow fabulous *rozás* or journey avoiding control and payment of any kind of transportation fees. In Santa Ana and Ararca some were said to leave the goods they’d carried from Cartagena at the harbor and placidly walked to their villages. At the entrance of the villages the stupefied travel-mates and the smiling knowledgeable men would find their crates waiting for them. Men who *knew* not only defied the ideology of hard, disciplined, dull labor with their magical knowledge. They also defied and tricked authorities, whether wealthy landowners or the threatening and corrupt Venezuelan policemen of migration stories. Of one of these men, an Ararquero, another elderly man said to me that he was a

diablo grande, (“big devil”). I didn’t get to know him because, according to a friend of his, before I started my fieldwork he had turned into an insect, got on a plane and travelled to San Andrés Island. His knowledge had granted him immunity from the powerful and the corrupt but had given him other disadvantages. As with people who worked with the Devil he was destined to be constantly broke. And *zánganos* and the Devil’s identities and personhoods overlap in the stories I collected as in the only colonial reference to *zánganos* I was able to find (see Splendiani, 1997).

Zánganos—like the Devil—teeter between compliance and unruliness, collaboration with hegemonic powers and subversion. Both have a profound knowledge of their social and physical landscape, a knowledge they can exploit in order to disturb, break and foster relationships, but their stories speak about several kinds and levels of physical and social transgression. They crowd and nourish a “phantasmagorical space” (Kapferer, 2002) which runs parallel to the Island’s (and the Bay’s) physical (trans-) territory. *Zánganos* are intermediaries. They mediate (again, like the Devil^{xl}) between human and animal, between patrons and employers, between the exceptionally wealthy and the poor and between opposed gender ideologies.

On the one side *zánganos* were said to be the *brujas*’ bosses (*jefes*) or their husbands (*maridos*). Therefore they were, on an explicit level, entitled to obedience and respect. But husbands and employers can, and routinely are, many think, cheated and exploited with a vast and subtle array of tactics. They were, for instance, forced by *brujas* to play the drums in their *fandangos*. Señor Luis, who keeps memory alive in the corregimiento of La Boquilla, told me he had wanted to be a drummer but, knowing that he could be obliged to play for the *brujas*, he had given up the idea. In La Boquilla elderly people still remembered Rafael Aguilar, a man who *knew*, and his red, wasted hands, consumed by the drumming he was forced to do for the *brujas*, who called him on certain nights. In some stories, *brujas* transported *zánganos*, who are unable to fly, on their backs, subverting the explicitly voiced, official, relation between masculinity and movement and femininity and rooted-ness and between teachers and pupils. *Zánganos* could be punished with death by abused women. These particularly enjoyed hitting drunken men who were trying to go back home and made them lose their way. Many had died after those encounters. A famous sea captain, for instance, who resisted for days, after a fire, holding on to the carcass of his boat, drowned in this way in a shallow pond, people remembered. These revenges could cause death even years after they had been meted out. The relationship between *zánganos*/Devil and *brujas* was ambiguous and strained. Like interactions between village men and women it was conditioned by certain constraints. It had to be negotiated. It could become uncontrollable and dangerous. The Devil of *brujería* stories did not possess his female followers through anal intercourse, like in colonial narratives. On the contrary, he had to stand the women’s irreverence. *Brujas*, when they met the Devil, usually rolled up their skirts and show Him their naked butts while roaring with laughter and clapping their hands. The Devil, an enraged Señor Enrique told me, hated *brujas* and would kill them if he caught them.

Then flying. *Brujas* are the only ones who are able to fly. Flying epitomizes freedom and subversion. Huon Wardle (2000) mentions in his work stories of slaves who had the capacity to fly back to Africa. The “extraterritoriality” of flying is, according to him, symbolization and a fantastic elaboration of lives shaped by deterritorialisation. It stands for the loss of a rightful place. Jaime Arocha and Nina de Friedmann (1986) in one of their works wrote about the story of a black man who in colonial Cuba was accused of gathering people and singing, in “another language” that he would fly away. Navarrete’s (1995;2005), Maya Restrepo’s(1998), de Mello e Souza’s(2004) and other historians’ works feature various cases of women, in colonial settings, which claimed to be able to

fly. Some were indigenous; others had learned from the indigenous or were *zambas*. Flying skills could be imputed to the African and black or to the European. Priests, either in Hauschild's (2011) Mediterranean setting, or according to an islander during my fieldwork, were able to fly. The knowledge contained in some books, which stood for the whites' and the *patrones'* power, caused involuntary levitation. Various researchers and especially female historians (see, for instance, Wilby, 2010; Pocs, 1999; Muraro, 2006; Messina, 2007), following Ginzburg's (2008) reflections on the "experiential components" of modern European flying narratives, are increasingly recognizing the presence of shamanistic spiritual elements in the accounts of popular class women and men who were tried for witchcraft. It would be interesting to follow this lead even in the case of the Bay's narratives. Right before the end of my fieldwork, from the city, for instance, a young Ararquero who lived near Cartagena told me that his wife's grandmother would sometimes say that she had visited Ararca in her dreams. It wasn't something she did with evil purpose, the elderly lady insisted. She *flew* there in order to heal and learn how to cure. Other stories add further intriguing dimensions (for instance the "indigenous" element) to these extraordinarily widespread themes^{xli}.

For the moment what interests me is the flight's disruptive, subversive and, also, constitutive potential. Rumors of mysterious flights could cause conflicts and division within a village but flights also brought together women from different parts of the world/region. *Brujas* not only flew, visiting other countries and learning from distant and unknown women. They also were united by the desire for knowing and by their subversion of moral, physical and social laws. They were the "happy" ones: they sang about their "happiness" when they met. This was perhaps what made them even more disturbing. They voiced, in the night, what could not be voiced during the day. Paradoxically, night-time movements, shadowy and secret as they were, contained more historical truth —women's working and journeying outside the house, their taste for adventure —than daytime official discourses^{xlii}.

Old forms of female sociability, which have almost disappeared from the villages, are probably embedded within images and stories associated with *brujería*. Navarrete noted that descriptions of *juntas* in colonial documents resemble those of the *rondas* of *fandangos/bullerengue*. Even the stories about the Devil and the witches, dancing and paying in circles, immediately resonate with the *rondas* of traditional music and a *barulero* friend of mine used to say that *brujas* tormented his father by circling around him (*hacer la ronda*). *Bullerengue*, its lyrics, the contexts in which it was danced and sung, were, in the words of a man (curiously, a Catholic monk) from Marialabaja I met at the beginning of my fieldwork, a "celebration of female power". Its lyrics dealt with female practices and activities and were often a way of transmitting to the younger women notions associated with, for instance, medicinal plants or daily work (Benitez, 2011). Lyrics were circulated, composed, modified and adjusted by the *cantaoras*, who entertained a conversation with a "chorus" of women. Even the musical instruments are gendered in the *bullerengue*, as there's a *tambor macho* and a *tambora hembra*. Drummers could be women and in Barú a famous *bruja*, who came from the Costa de María, was a *cantaora* and a drummer. It was nevertheless common for a group of feasting women to have a single male drummer. He was usually "commanded" by the main *cantaora*, who demanded more "energy" (for instance: "*Dale duro a ese tambor*"! Hit it harder!), teased, provoked, let her skirt slither upon the male drums. *Bullerengues* were usually composed and sung by *mujeres paridas*, women who had already encountered life's harshness and its pleasures. *Bullerengue* could represent a survival of older female rites/ceremonials of African origins.

Whatever we might think about the probably irretraceable roots of these and other forms of sociality, the settings and groups within which all-female sociality unfolded have almost disappeared. Colonial *cuadrillas*, close-knit groups of *cantaoras*, *cuagros* (same age/same sex cohorts in Palenque de San Basilio) and, perhaps, much later and in a degraded form, *bonches* (intimate groups of friends of a similar age and of the same sex, fundamental structure of young Cartageneros' social life until some decades ago, according to Mosquera, 1999) have probably constituted other social formations in which women could socialize, learn, remember, find support and, in some of these circles, reproduce alternative values and cosmological visions and perform partially autonomous, interstitial, spiritual/religious/healing practices^{xliii}. The *cuadrillas of brujas* of colonial Cartagena and the stories about the "*colegios de brujas*" of the Island could refer to semi-secret female spaces and informal institutions, where the African heritage was reshaped by Southern European and indigenous religious/magical traditions.

Lila Abu Lughod (1999) noted in her description of the gradual disappearance of exclusively female ritual dances among the Bedouins, that modernity has endowed women with new possibilities but also stripped them of important (social, spiritual, cognitive, symbolic) tools for self-definition and empowerment. Most of these were shaped by female sociability, which was positively valued instead of being stigmatized as dangerous, as it happens now. Abu Lughod's ideas resonate with Seremetakis' (1991) reflections about modernity's constitutive and destructive effects. Perhaps even flying stories, *santiguos* and *bullerengue*'s gestures are "like fragments of a dismembered and submerged female body" (1991, p.236), floating signs which can be recomposed and re-signified within hybrid and new imaginaries and social dynamics but whose performers and narrators, like Seremetakis' Maniati women, "have also experienced the erosion of the local social structures and institutions within which [stories practices] had a performative value" (p.236). As with the practices Seremetakis researched in Greece, it can be difficult, for black and rural *costeños* (and for apparently open-minded researchers) to recognize *brujería*'s, and especially female *brujería*'s, systemic properties. This acknowledgement is a political act. Retrieving the antagonistic and systemic character of *brujería* is, for the historian and the anthropologist, simultaneously easier — as distance and a variety of written and oral sources make patterns stand out more clearly — and more hazardous as Christian, Eurocentric and gender-biased prejudices still plague the academic discourse on witchcraft. The clues pointing towards the experiential, spiritual, and counterhegemonic dimensions of *brujería* have been obliterated or dismissed.

In the island evangelism and, more recently, Charismatic Catholicism have provided alternative spaces for female socialization, which are nevertheless placed under male symbolic (and factual) authority. At the same time charismatic religious cults have further stigmatized previous spaces and practices, perhaps, paradoxically, sensing in them the spiritual and social oppositional values which folklore often failed to grasp. Nowadays new understandings are being attached to images and fragments of stories echoing older practices. A famous *champeta*, *La suegra voladora*, can be seen as a young urban male interpretation of stories of flying *brujas*. It is possibly the most famous, nationally known, *champeta* and, not incidentally, one of those which move farther from the "creole" sound of the genre and is so close to global hip hop to be almost unrecognizable from it. In it mothers-in-law's nocturnal escapades are reduced to pretexts for sexual encounters between an overexcited and slightly ridiculed older woman and a young and sexually skillful man. "*Ya le cogí el maní a la suegra*" ("I caught my mother-in-law's peanut", that is to say, I discovered her secret but there is also an evident sexual connotation in this refrain), *El Sayayin* sings, lumping together magical secrets and sexual cravings. In the popular *champeta* the ambiguous and polysemic domain of flying women is interpreted

according to current hegemonic gender ideologies. There is no secret knowledge. There are no mysterious encounters, female teaching or subversive trips. It was all about sex, *El Sayayin* implies. The rest is legend.

“Some could take off their skins...” : personhood, intimacy and identity in magical narratives.

Ambiguous personhood

Brujería narratives reflect local notions of personhood, intimacy and belonging. *Brujería* also is a cosmology. It is the world-ordering and dis-ordering discourse (*logos*) of the periphery. It's a tapestry woven out of variously tinted filaments, one whose overall pattern changes according to the position of those who observe it, to their distance and to the lights or shadows which invest it at different times.

Borders between humans and non-humans could be thin in Barú, as in other villages of the Bay. Shape shifting was *brujas* and *zánganos*' main activity. They turned into animals, plants, rocks. They stretched and shrank, they took off their skins and “darted” into a different shape (*se echan a*). Their transformation was never complete, never perfect, though. *Brujas* were said to metamorphose their whole bodies but to keep their human head. Rumors about some women's involvement in *brujería* had been confirmed because someone has seen their heads attached to the squeaking, braying or howling bodies of what could have passed for “normal” animals. According to Señor Enrique what hindered complete metamorphosis was another kind of magic, that of Catholic baptism, which with holy water made the head immune from transformations that God hadn't either designed nor sanctioned. Other people did not mention baptism and were more flexible towards the transformative potential of a human body, if strengthened by the wondrous power of the right knowledge. They also suggested that individuality and personhood could be lost forever. It had happened. Some people had given in to the shape-shifting compulsion and had definitely merged with the unshorn vastness of the *monte*.

“Some of them (*brujas*) take off their skins, to transform themselves. So that nobody recognizes them. But they must know how to take the skin off and put it back. They must know how to cover up. Some do not know and so they give themselves away. And there are some who turned into ferocious animals and never came back...” (ML, Ararca, 2012)

Shape-shifting is a constant feature of European magic from classical antiquity to the modern era^{xliv}. The documents produced by the Inquisition Tribunal in Cartagena often mention the accused's extraordinary impulse towards breaking free from the shapes the Christian God had assigned them and his representatives had the obligation to watch upon. Shape-shifting, producing hybrids/mixtures, is another expression, on a symbolic and imaginative level, of a “liminal” social position and of a cosmological stance, of a spiritual habitus, were the world and human body aren't bounded and self-contained.

That the boundaries between humans and nonhumans were subtle and could be trespassed by individual/entities possessing the right formulas was also revealed by certain people's capacities for manipulating animals and plants. Víctor Vives, in Ararca, young Miguel, who grew up as his neighbor, told me, convinced fruits to fall on his hands, trees to speed up their reproduction and negotiated with donkeys his transportation to the *monte*. He had gone through a frightening, transformative ritual in order to acquire his knowledge.

“He (VV) taught. He taught *brujos*. How they had to shape-shift and he’d tell us that if you wanted to turn into a *bruja* you needed to have guts. There was a big, big, rough snake and you had to let it swallow you and then it would throw you up and you would be an expert. He had done that. He was a professional *zangano*. His ancestors taught him, because he was old already. And he taught many people [...] he’d speak with the animals. If there was a donkey he’d tell her: come here, bring me there. And she’d bring him. [...] Tremendous. Talking to an animal. With any animal. Even with fruits. He told me. Come here, I need to eat, I am hungry, and fruits would fall down on him” (Aaraca, 2012)

The term *aparato* (which can mean an appearance, a vision, but also a mechanism or device) denotes con-fusion between agents and objects. It renders the breaking apart of the subject-object dualisms within magic’s dynamics. *Aparatos*, people said, were things/beings which popped out from nothing, which “appeared” abruptly. But *aparatos* were also made, with the right words and through allegiance with or cooptation of powerful beings. Some people turned into *aparatos* and also made *aparatos*.

Sometimes even between the world of the living and that of the dead boundaries seemed to blur. Señor Nestor, with whom I sometimes discussed religious matters and who, fiercely, denied that an afterworld existed, was adamant in saying that the dead walked *this* world and that he had seen some with his eyes. He was the owner (*dueño*) of a *secreto* that helped people who were tormented by the incessant stalking some dead are inclined to engage in. He told me that an *indio* had taught it to him and that he had also revealed that the *secreto* didn’t need to be handed down to any other person, as it usually happened, but, in order to be forgotten forever, his owner released from any obligation to invisible forces, could be recited over a hole dug in the earth and then buried. Señor Enrique, to whom I talked about his fellow villager’s vision didn’t offer any comment on another man’s *secreto*, but volunteered to tell me that “your own dead” (*los muertos propios, los muertos de uno*) didn’t need any special prayer to be kept at bay. You can summon an unruly dead at midday or at midnight, provided that you are alone, outside or in your own house. When he shows up, being careful not to show disrespect or raise your voice, because the caller is doomed to become the summoned at some point, you invite him to go away. Both the dead persecutor and the living persecuted must acknowledge that dead and living share this world and have gone or will go through the same experiences. A dead must be scolded gently. “I buried you with my own hands”, Señor Enrique told his unquiet dead once.

The dead, and corpses and elements and places associated with death, like cemetery dirt or the burial ground as a whole, are dangerous and powerful, frightening and indispensable for various kinds of *trabajos*. In historical and geographical contexts as different as nineteenth century Cuba (Cabrera, 1993) colonial Cartagena (Navarrete, 1995; 2005; Maya, 1998), pre-modern Europe (Federici, 2004) and colonial Perú (Silverblatt, 2006) magic experts used fragments of corpses for their charms and cures. And, of course, the Catholic Church itself actively promoted the cult of relics, that is to say, of the corpses of especially powerful dead, the “saints”. The practitioners of Afro-american cults like *quimbanda*, *palo* or voodoo use and cherish bones or other body-parts as relics and ceremonial tools. Some *santiguadoras* of the past, in Barú, used the bones, skins and the remains of small animals and insects in order to fashion charms, which were often tied, inside small purses, around young children’s necks. I was also told that in the village there was a woman, nicknamed Pita and reputed to *know*, who would warn villagers when a corpse hadn’t been properly buried. “*Me los como todos!*” (“I am going to eat them all!), she would shout. Maya (1998) argues that is possible that necrophagic ceremonies had been part of magical/medical rituals in the past. I am more inclined to think that the interest towards human or animal body-parts reflects a holistic concept of

the world and of human and animal bodies. Bodies and body-parts store powerful energies, which can be accessed and exploited through possession and consumption.

Dangerous intimacy

Geschière (2011) has written extensively about the ambiguous role of intimate relationships within narratives about sorcery in Africa. His ideas about the “dangers of intimacy” resonate with my fieldwork stories. Relatives and neighbors were very likely to be defined as and rumored to be *brujos* in the villages. Relatives and neighbors often competed for the same scarce resources and knew family or individual matters which could threaten a person’s reputation. Many individuals claimed they had been victims of the *bruja parelera*’s rumor-spreading activities. *Brujas pareleras* do not know how to fly, to summon spirits or to entertain the Devil, but they do know how to listen to private matters and to disseminate them throughout a village or throughout the island. Words can change people’s feelings and even the course of their lives when and if appropriately uttered and distributed, whether they are charms, *oraciones* (prayers), gossip, or a man’s sweet-talking.

Since magical practice was inherently ambiguous, attributions of magical, ambivalent skills could constantly be made or refuted by referring to a relative’s knowledge or *lack of* knowledge. Señor Raúl was a farmer, a drummer, the last person who *knew* how to fabricate drums in the village, a relative of people who had *known* and, for some villagers, a *sabido* himself. Some villagers warned me about him. Others laughed and declared that the man was teasing me. Señor Raúl didn’t really *know* anything, they would say. His grandfather was the one who did, they would add. Señor Raúl, for his part, tried to convey an unequivocal image of his mother and of his grandparents. They had not *known* anything at all. But when he recounted episodes of his life in which some of his deceased relatives featured, things did seem different. His mother and his grandmother had been midwives and *rezanderas* and his grandfather a *partero* (all categories of people sometimes associated with magical/medical practice) but they hadn’t approved of his curiosity towards devilish things (*cosas del Diablo*).

Raúl claimed he had learnt what he knew through book that a *cachaco* had owned. The man, who looked after an isolated *finca*, in the islands of Rosario, had been killed by his own dogs, probably because someone who *knew* more than him had set the animals against their keeper. Señor Raúl’s mother got the man’s magical book and kept it locked until she died. According to her own son, she had done it because she knew that her son had a “bad heart” (*un corazon malo*) and would otherwise look for the diabolical things the book, whose cover featured the Devil himself, could teach. Ambiguity figured at various point in Señor Raúl’s story. His mother and grandmother did not supposedly know anything about a magic but the former knew that the *Libro infernal* could protect her from evil intentions and also had a sense of what her son wanted to achieve. The *cachaco* was not an islander but he lived in the island and, as other non-local keepers, similarly rumored to *know*, had lived for some time near the village and knew the *monte*. What was explicitly negated, unfolded, blurred but also multiplied in small details, within the story which was being narrated. Even when Señor Raúl talked about himself, he moved from a self-representation in which he was a competent herbalist, a person who liked helping other people, sought after by perspective clients and fellow healers in and beyond Cartagena, and one in which he talked of himself as a *maligno*, a person who, in order to fight against evil, had to get his hands dirty and learn to deal with satanic issues.

Lovers were another category of individuals over which suspicions of witchcraft could fall. According to Annie, for instance, her daughters had been trapped into relationships that were not convenient for them, because one of her son-in-laws was

backed by his *brujo* uncle and the other came from a lineage of *brujos* and was himself dangerous. “Tying” (*amarrar*) a man or woman, as I have said in another chapter, is a powerful symbol for the control the other, especially the intimate other, can exert over the body-self. “Tying” is also a potent reminder of the instability and ambiguity of sexual and economic exchanges. Sorcery, as envy, from which it usually springs, can have lethal effects on innocent people who happen to be related with the targeted intimate others. Some villagers, whose infants died during the first months of their lives, recounted they had found a tiny, almost invisible spot, somewhere in their children’s dead bodies, a sign that the poor children had been attacked by malevolent creatures. Envious relatives and neighbors could kill babies by sucking their life out of their nostrils and navels. Many of these evil *sorceresses* (*hechiceras*) are thought to be women competing for the same man’s economic support. In killing a baby, they would try to avert the flow of paternal obligations from a mother’s house and redirect it towards other households. Other dangerous and ambivalent facets of intimacy were exemplified, in common talk, by the expression *no estar limpio a limpio* or *no estar limpio* usually said of people who were rumored to have conquered a lover or a partner through *brujería* or who were, more generally, suspected of dealing with magic. It could be referred to an aunt, a grandfather, a rival or a husband.

Certain *aparatos* were particularly apt to represent the perils of intimacy and especially a tension similarity/relatedness versus detachment and otherness. A paradigmatic example is the *Mohán*, an entity which figures in stories coming from different regions of Colombia. *Mohanes* are aquatic, ambiguous, shifty creatures who are said to dwell in or nearby marshes and ponds. Since they cannot reproduce, they crave human children whom they try to lure towards their watery realms. Near Barú, a particular marsh is called the *Ciénaga del Mohán* but *Mohanes* can live anywhere in the *Monte*. In Ararca they were said to dwell near the old *poza* (pond) where women used to wash their laundry.

When I asked what the *Mohán* looked like I was told that the *Mohán* is *cualquier persona* (any person), that the *Mohán es uno mismo*, that “we are the *Mohanes*”. The *Mohán* can take the shape of any individual. In stories about *Mohanes* —as the *Mohán* is a plural, indeterminate identity —*Mohanes* take the semblances of parents and friends and deceive children, who think they are following a mother or an aunt into the hazy space of the *Monte*. When a child has disappeared and there are chances that she might have been taken by the *Mohán*, the only thing to do is ask her “godmother of the church’s door” (*madrina de la puerta de la iglesia*, the woman who brings the kid from her house to the door of the church, where she handed her to the real godparents) to go to the place where the *Mohán* might be and call out for it. The *madrina* should state clearly that she has brought salt with her. *Mohanes*, in fact, do not eat salt^{xlv}, like many other magical creatures, but at the same time they seem eager for it as they are for the blood of the living.

The *Mohán* questions the unity and the intelligibility of self and of the intimate others. The *Mohán* shows the elusiveness and deceitfulness of the “shapes” on which we usually rely. The *Mohán* casts suspicions about the environment, about the roads and paths on which people daily walk and that are never exactly the same, never totally recognizable.

The *monte* wasn’t what it seemed. Its streams and paths could either bring you somewhere or lose you. They were inhabited and traversed by entities whose purpose was confounding. The *Mohán* simultaneously questioned the authorized ceremonies of official religion and reaffirmed their importance by appropriating, extending, transforming some of the official religious elements. It re-affirmed the indispensable function of fictitious

kinship, especially for historically uprooted people and for the popular classes. Individuals who temporarily mirror the liminal positions of “moorish” children (*niños moros*, children who haven’t been baptized), like the godmother who carries the child from the relatively safe space of his/her house to the sacred space of the church, could deal with intrinsically liminal creatures. Baptism didn’t grant immunity from “the other”, as neither did the Creed. The powers of benevolent intentions, of beneficial sociability must be re-asserted during the moment of crises, as when a childless *Mohán* attempted to disconnect a child from her kin ties and make her part of a new supernatural (but sterile) lineage. The *Mohán*, like the individuals it impersonates, kidnaps and turns into kin, is “part of” and “stands apart”. It thrives in the semi-domesticated spaces where daily labor and wonders coexist. It is part of the *monte*, but only of certain, swampy, obscure, areas of it. It is alien and human. It is familiar and radically other. Its dwelling in the island’s interstitial spaces should not be a cause for surprise.

Identity, magic and the “others”

Wondrous and frightening capacities are variably attributed to different others. As in other ethnographic contexts, magic is always “somewhere else” (Taussig, 1987); it is imputed to various “others”. According to villagers *brujas* from all over the world flew over the island. They came from Bogotá, from Medellín, from Sincelejo, but also from India, a distant place full of *Indios* and from nameless regions abounding with white-skinned individuals. *Brujas*’comings and goings were powerful reminders of historical contacts and movements and of the appropriations, elaborations and subversions of various hegemonic discourses about certain social groups. *Brujas*’ excursions condensed the history of interactions through which identity and place had been negotiated and represented in the island. Magical books, like many flying women, also usually came from somewhere else. It was usually a *cachaco*, or a *patrón*, who brought a magical book to the island.

As in Taussig’s work, in Cartagena and its rural areas indigenous people were surrounded by an aura of mysticism. They were considered powerful, mysterious, often dangerous creatures. People who claimed to be indigenous often visited the rural areas of the Bay and sold *aseguranzas* (amulets) or offered consultations about various kinds of afflictions. Some young, male villagers had met indigenous people during their military service. This was Diego’s case. He had met them in the Sierra Nevada, in the neighboring department of Magdalena, and in the Perijá, a mountain chain bordering with Venezuela, which has been torn apart by guerrilla, paramilitary activity and drugs-smuggling for many years. Diego had consulted a *parapiscólogo* once, when he was living in Bogotá as he had inadvertently consumed a “bad” drink (*un trago malo*) intended for another person and, after that, experienced several problems with women. While he recognized that the man had showed him he had the abilities to diagnose the origins of his abrupt disturbance, he said he had not followed his advices as he was afraid of meddling with *brujería* (even when represented as urban *parapiscología*). But the *indios* were, for Diego, an altogether different story. They had given him charms against snakes when he camped in the Sierra with the army. One of them had told him that he had had the intuition that Diego had helped his brothers (other, generalized, unspecific *indios*) when they needed support and had given him an *aseguranza* as a present. Although Diego’s comrades had often bought “prayers” when visiting towns, in order to ward off bullets and other perils, he felt he could only trust the *indios*.

The indigenous could therefore be linked with unspoiled nature, with authenticity, with a vibrant cosmos whose energies could be used to cure and regenerate. For others the association indigenous- nature, though, had negative and frightening connotations: *indios*

were sorcerers, they *worked* with the Devil. They didn't know or understand Christ's teachings and still trusted their idols. They were savage. They were unpredictable. The fantasized/remembered interactions between Baruleros and the indigenous population of the Caribbean and of nearby Colombian regions, and those between black and indigenous people, from the Colony onwards, were ambiguous, contradictory, marked by alliances, cooperation, violence and stigmatization. As I showed in the first chapter, historical interactions and the ways they have been remembered and narrated, have fostered sweeping and ambivalent perceptions about indigenous men and women. Interestingly, villagers spoke about contacts and re-imagined encounters but they rarely recognized the indigenous flavors of their own imagery and fantastic narratives. In fact, people's stories about the ordeal a *brujo* had to go through in order to acquire his power share many elements with the shamanic practices described by Taussig (1987), Reichel Dolmatoff and Ocampo (2008) among others. In Taussig's accounts of Siona shamans' experiences, for instance, the prospective healers need to let themselves be "wrapped up" by huge snakes and have intimate encounters with a jaguar.

Other categories of people were imbued with magic. *Antioqueños*, were considered to be prone to *brujería* and sorcery. The coastal tip of the Department of Antioquia is inhabited by black peasants who were often part of the network of transactions and contacts in which black *costeños* participated^{xlvi}. Moreover, people often feared Antioqueños. They constituted the majority of *cachacos* who owned shops and lent money in the villages. Young *paisas* (*pagadarios*) were often the visible face of mysterious money-lending entrepreneurs. They had a reputation for dealing with *narcotráfico* and paramilitaries and were said to have tattoos and other amulets inserted within their skin or behind their fingernails, to ward off bullets and avoid mortal wounds. The media had recently fostered this association between Antioquia and magic by broadcasting series like *La bruja*, which strengthened the link between white Antioqueños and magical arts.

Magic, finally, was attributed to individuals and groups whose origins associated them with "real", powerful, blackness. "Blackness" or "African-ness" can be deployed, in magical practices and narratives, in order to fashion representations of powerful selves and mysterious, dangerous others. Like other quasi-magical powers which have been historically attributed to blacks —like sexual prowess or musical ability —magical skills can be made to signify a positive self-identification with potent and secret "ancestral" knowledge. More often, anyway, *phantasmagorical* blackness, the blackness of other social groups, of other territories, is negatively represented. It's mysterious and threatening. Yet people like Raúl claimed often to interact and exchange information with Chocoanos (or Guajiro indigenous) in order to enhance their repertoire of magical remedies.

During my fieldwork race and magical capacities were coupled in different ways. In the city, some friends often warned me about islanders. In *those* villages, they would say, there was a lot of sorcery and I had to be very careful. Local men were said to be especially dangerous. They were capable of bewitching me. The risk was that I'd end up "tied" to one of them. My children would be *morenitos* and would have kinky hair. In Ararca, Barú and Santa Ana, but also in the conversations I had with people from other black *corregimientos* of Cartagena, like La Boquilla, or Punta Canoa, *brujería* always predominated "elsewhere". For them Baruleros, Santaneros and Ararqueros were the ones who really "knew". According to Ararqueros, Santa Ana and Barú were the real repositories of *brujería*. In La Boquilla I was pointed towards Punta Canoa and so on.

People from the *Otra Costa*, especially those coming from San Antonio de La Varcés, Libertad and Rincón del Mar, were also endowed with magical capacities. Flying

brujas were said to come often from those villages. Many people in the island recognized and remembered that their parents, grandparents and godparents had come from the black villages of what is now the department of Sucre or from the area of Montes de Maria. *La otra costa* was simultaneously “similar” and “different”. It was easy to get there, once, and it still is, potentially, for those who know the secrets of water paths, but the towns of *La Otra Costa* were difficult to reach when relying on public transportation and many of them had been made inaccessible, in the recent past, because affected by a harsh wave of paramilitary violence. Individuals and families had fled from their villages and taken refuge in and nearby Cartagena. *La otra costa* was temporally and spatially close and distant at the same time, as were “blackness” and “magic”. And its inhabitants, like relatives and neighbors occupied an ambiguous position. They were similar and uncanny, unpredictable and familiar.

Chocoanos were similarly said to *know* about magic and sorcery, although few people could identify the geographical position of Chocó within the Colombian state, especially among the younger generation, who hadn’t gone through the experience of navigation and smuggling. It would be interesting to know what Chocoanos think about *Costeños*. I have a hint. I once befriended a Chocoano lawyer and musician in Cartagena, an educated man who also worked with regional institutions. He once told me he found that black *Costeños* were less educated and coarser than black Chocoanos. They had retained their “African” traditions, which were visible, for instance, in Palenqueros’ language. According to him, these differences had to be attributed to their activities within the economic structures of the colony: while the Chocoanos had predominantly been domestic slaves, black *Costeños* had been forced to work in the fields. Ironically, he contradicted both islanders’ ideas and common academic representations of Chocó as the reservoir of “traditional”, blackness and flung magic back to Cartagena.

Thomas Hauschild (2011) has written that magic is also about peoples and communities making decisions regarding “whom you allow to comfort you, whose power you involve yourself with and whom you drive out of your family” (p.204). Magic unveils and hides again things which cannot be openly shown or claimed. It imitates, evokes and re-veils alliances and allegiances, questionable and mandatory “collaboration”. Neither does it formally and officially deny Catholicism nor it upholds its doctrines. Its undercurrents, nevertheless, swell and race with other possibilities, with individual and local differences, creativity and memories. Deciding what kind of forces foster and dissolve places and peoples and who is entitled to partake of or claim special relationships with their power is a foundational and, somehow, a militant act. There are signs, fewer in Barú, stronger in other contexts (Venezuela, for instance), that the relationship between magic and blackness could re-acquire positive connotations, providing new interpretations of the past and counter-representations of entrenched national identities. As I showed in the previous chapter, other, transnational identities, especially those re-created and circulated by global Pentecostalism, included the black and the poor within their domain, but previously stripped them of the interpretative possibilities that blackness (as a product of specific historical power relations) could foster. They did it without denying magic, but they turned the latter’s ambiguity into unequivocal menace.

Part II

Magical practices: words, herbs, bodies.

Oscar lived at a short distance from the *Playón* of Ararca. He cured *inflamaciones* and other kinds of mild problems of jaunts, bones and muscles through powerful words

and massages. While I was talking to him a young girl came in with a sore arm. Oscar had her sit down and started stroking gently the aching part while he murmured words we couldn't understand. I realized he had put on the girl's wrist some *mentolín*, a strong menthol lotion that was widely used to force the body to expel the substance which is said to cause the "inflammation". I knew I couldn't ask about his secret, the powerful words he carefully applied to the hurting limb. By now I had learnt already how not to be *arbitraria*, a word a friend of mine used to comment on my curiosity about things I was not supposed to get to know. We did talk about fishing and giant groupers (*meros*), instead, about the perils of fishing alone in the night and thus, inevitably, about *brujas*. Once, he recounted, while he was fishing, his boat had been run over and almost reduced to a useless wreck. Oscar had not paid attention to his father warnings: do not fish in the night! Roger, the man who had accompanied me to Oscar's house, also had things to say about nocturnal wrongdoers and the ways to keep them at bay. He had worked for a long time as a guard and he had witnessed a colleague's torment. The man had been persecuted by shameless *brujas*. They had made his work-shifts a nightmare and had later been vanquished through counter-magic and, in particular, by the tossing of sea-shells. Before we went away, Oscar gave me a bunch of creased papers scribbled with protective charms (*oraciones*) that I later copied and gave him back.

When I tried to talk to the *santiguadora* of Ararca, I didn't have the same luck. She didn't seem happy to see me. She wanted to know who had sent me there and she wanted me to know that she didn't *know* anything at all. The women who had given me her name to me: those really *knew*. I was embarrassed and hurt by her reaction but I didn't want to go away from her house without explaining that I did not intend to offend her and that the fact that I often attended the Pentecostal church didn't mean I believed she was doing evil things, as the "evangelicals", she said, usually declared. I didn't know at that stage that she had a life-long grudge with one of the persons I often visited in the village. This could have explained her behavior. When the atmosphere cooled down a bit she told me she had learnt from a female relative and that her *santiguo* (the words she recited over ailing children and over children who needed to be protected, uttered while signing them as in catholic ceremonies) was a secret she would take to her grave. Her kids, she added, didn't deserve to learn it. They would "spread it out" at once. Young people, and it wasn't certainly the first time I heard of such opinions, either from enraged, embittered voiced or from resigned ones, didn't know how to keep secrets. You couldn't trust them anymore. People were also getting skeptical and suspicious, she said. They wouldn't believe in the beneficial power of "traditions", they despised them, or they thought she could harm children. In one case she had to use her *santiguo* surreptitiously on one of her grandchildren and against her daughter's wishes. Her daughter had later attributed the improvement in her child's conditions to other factors.

The *santiguo*, which was usually "applied" (*poner*) to children but that could also be used for sick adults, was usually recited over an infant for seven Fridays and until the Holy Friday. It was always transmitted from an older practitioner to a younger one and inheritance usually follows kinship, either socio-biological or the fictitious kinship of god-parenthood. In the past, I was told in Barú by another *santiguadora*, it was very common to fashion amulets that were tied around babies' and toddlers' necks. A practitioner's words, her intentions, the sounds coming out of her body, were said to have a powerful effect on the ailing body. The cross, sacred symbol of Christianity, like the "Creed", the official prayer of the Catholic church—ensuring and reaffirming membership inside a Christian community, ratifying a protective allegiance with the most powerful entities of Catholic Pantheon—enclosed, protected people, and especially the ones whose hold on this world was still precarious, children, or was threatened by an

ailment, within a geometrical figure whose potentialities accommodated Christian imagery, the cardinal points, and an arboreal symbolism imbued with (indigenous, African, popular European) spirituality. The pervasive utilization of catholic instruments and ceremonies, their re-adaptation and contextual apprehension, speak of a world “on the fringes” of Catholic orthodoxy, which as Hauschild (2011) wrote about the practices of the female south-Italian magicians he interacted with for decades, neither explicitly denied the validity of catholic ceremonies and the power of Christian divinities, nor followed them meticulously. These practices reflected a historical mix of acceptance, critique, reformulation and creativity.

Herbs were often used to protect a person’s body or her house. Many women knew how to brew and use them but those who really *knew*, those who knew how to cure and heal, people said, were all dead. Midwives, in each village, had usually preserved the art of wisely mixing herbs and other substances and they certainly were those who are willing to talk about it more freely. Señora Adele, in Barú, was one of the persons who told to me about the herbs she knew how to gather and brew into tepid water or used for baths in order to relieve birthing women’s *inflamación*.

Herbs usually must be gathered and used in a certain number and in specific combinations and conjunction with certain prayers. The *sábila* (Aloe Vera), when planted outside the house, absorbed any dangerous liquid malignant people might throw against it. The *ruda* (Ruta Graveolens) also protected and healed a host of problems. Tobacco was put to a different use. Its smoke a thin stream of particles, diagnosed, for those who could interpret its signs, “travels”(viajes) and “visits”(visitas), what was to come and what wouldn’t arrive. Divination through tobacco was associated with indigenous knowledge (mainly *wayuu/guajiro*) and with Venezuela, where it was widely practiced and taught through booklets and manuals circulating in various Latin American countries. Herbs like the *almendro* the *mataratón*, the *anamú* (Petiveria Alliacea L.) which was even credited to fight off cancer could be used for infusions and against different problems. Many of these, although manifesting with an *inflamación* had been caused by people’s envy and malicious intentions.

A local term, *supuesto*, illustrates the idea that words and dispositions have a real effect on people’s body and that interactions with a malignant person can affect with tragic consequences bodies and lives. The word *supuesto* (supposed) reinstates ambiguity within a popular biomedical terminology people are getting more and more familiar with. Some people, like Señora Esperanza’s son, had died of a cancer *supuesto*, a cancer planted into an individual’s body by a malignant person. Such a cancer is “supposed” to be the cause of death and suffering but it has also been “*puesto*” (inserted) inside the body. “*El cáncer supuesto solo el brujo lo cura*”(Only a *brujo* can heal a cancer which has been implanted through witchcraft), I was told. Medical knowledge couldn’t deal with powerful human sentiments that have existed from the beginning of time.

Words, intentions, like herbs, influenced and shaped the body because this is thought of as a permeable entity. It is a porous body which must be put in conditions to maintain the proper balance between heat and cold. It is open, flexible, receptive to the wind, the rain, to other bodies-selves. According to my landlady, one of the neighbors, a woman whose graphic imprecations easily crossed the thin wooden fence that separated her *patio* from ours, had been the unintentional cause of her young child’s developmental disabilities. Shouting and swearing had made her womb too “hot”. The womb is considered to be a particularly receptive organ. After birth, a moment in which the body opens even more, it has to be “tied” (through bandages and special girdles) to be refrained from moving around looking for the lost baby. The womb, which in some Afro-american contexts is thought to be inhabited by a spirit (Charvet, 2010), transgresses limits like

brujas, the “bad” women, do. I always thought that it was poignant that many of the “fallen” *brujas* that figure within *brujería* narratives, were said to have been *recién paridas* (women who had recently given birth).

Local bodies were always fighting for a precarious balance between *inflamación* and “cold” (*frío*). *Inflamación* is usually provoked by excessive exposure to the sun or by contact with or ingestion of certain substances. It can be passed to another person through intimate contact and sexual relations, as it’s opposite, the *frío*. The *frío* was produced by cold, damp substances, like the water accumulated in ponds after the rain or the December winds (*brisas*), or by, for example, going to funerals and wakes, visiting cemeteries^{xlvii}. Certain kinds of “birth” were said to be “cold” and midwives who were affected by arthritis could refuse to attend them. Women who had recently given birth couldn’t attend *velorios* (funeral wakes).

The wondrous physical and imaginary spaces of popular Catholicism provided occasions and structures for special kinds of sociality, which are gradually disappearing and which are often, nowadays, a cause for preoccupation. The Holy Week, for instance, was the period in which, during Colonial times, slaves were given some days off, and the popular classes in and nearby Cartagena feasted with unusual amounts of food, drinks and games (this was cause for concern for the religious authorities, see Helg, 2011). In the island, card and lottery games were still common, as the canonic *visítas*. During Holy Week people leaving in Cartagena and in other cities tried to go back to the island and shared meals with kin and friends. The food was still abundant during my fieldwork but the *picó* had replaced the traditional mass and music genres. Some women still kept the custom of cooking early in the morning and later refraining from any domestic chore, as was once “mandatory”. Yet, many people did not send out food anymore to neighbors, godparents, relatives and friends, as customs had dictated, and were extremely wary of the food they occasionally received. Some people were said to have been killed by the food offered during Holy Week. This had always been a dangerous period (Christ was dead and *brujos* and the Devil free to do as they pleased). Recently, anyway, people seemed to worry more about their intimates’ intentions than about supernatural creatures. Similarly, the traditional nine nights wake, held after a villager’s funeral, was getting less and less common and was often stigmatized as sorcery, ignorance or “splurging” by the villagers who had been influenced by Pentecostalism.

Working with the saints

Saints are both “spirits” and material containers of spiritual energies. Saints are powerful, influential *difuntos* (deceased individuals) whose forces, still manifesting in the world, could, provided that one learns how to decipher and summon them, be put to *work* to one’s advantage.

Saints hide under their catholic guises, in the contexts in which Afro-American religions have been preserved and still flourish, other potent entities, like the *orishas* or the *loas*. But even where no or little memories of these beings have been retained, Catholic saints can catalyze and hide secret currents, alternative possibilities. Their lives and adventures can contradict official hagiographies and reveal, through bizarre tales, puzzling details, or omissions, the complexity and the multidimensionality of their identity. Local saints—and all saints turn into locals, when their paths cross the island—have thrived within the interstices, feeding them with visions, symbols and stories gathered during their journeys across the Caribbean and the Atlantic and their moving between geographical, temporal and social divides.

When people said that someone *worked* with saints, they referred at the same time to a saint's image/statue, to a spiritual force and to the words, fashioned a long time ago and re-actualized at each reading/reciting, that must be uttered in order to access the entity's power. I heard about people working with the Anima Sola, the Lonely Soul, and people who worked with San Martín de Loba, with Santa Marta or with Santa Eléna, both powerful entities, capable of "tying" hearts and bodies and turning apparently firm dispositions into more flexible stances. Some worked with Buddha, which before joining the Pantheon of "popular" Catholicism had to be baptized, and others with the *Piedra Imán* (personification of the magnet, which has its prayers and rituals, listens to mass and can be blessed through Holy Water) or with the *Tres Potencias*, a trinity of powerful female divinities who protect their devotees against perils. Villagers who have lived in Venezuela have brought back "Venezuelan" saints and started to have dealings with Maria Lionza, and with the Negro Felipe. José Gregorio Hernández is an old Venezuelan acquaintance. The elders remembered his healing rituals and the "secretaries" (*secretarios*), who informally handled José Gregorio's business. In Cartagena there were still healers who worked by receiving his spirit. Some saints helped to find lost objects and give information about lost animals, other comforted and supported in various ways. They usually must be convinced, lured or tricked into helping. Some had to be threatened and forced, tied, exposed to the unrelenting sun or (like San Martín in Ararca) tossed upside down into a muddy pond.

In order to work with saints one is supposed to learn how to summon them through the appropriate *oraciones* or "secrets" (*secretos*). Allegiance to particular saints was showed by the protracted utilization of their *oraciones*. Most were invocations to Christ, the Virgin^{xlviii} or other Catholic figures and were often structured around brief *historiolae*, the sometimes extravagant and unorthodox popular chronicles of a saint's adventures and wondrous life. Saints' icons and their stories, which *oraciones* recapitulate and disseminate, have defining characteristics (ex: Saint Roque: wound and dog; Saint Martha: girdle and dragon/reptile). Traits, objects and names (ex: San Expedito, who grants expedite solutions) figuring within a saint's domain are used as magical metaphors. Then, for example, if Santa Marta once tied a fierce dragon to her girdle she can now help women who want to subdue hostile individuals or bind them to their will. Reciters participate in the re-actualization of a saint's mythology and hope to be touched and changed by their powers. The use *oraciones* entails a form of reciprocity. With them, memories —of saints' stories, also shaped by a mass of anonymous individuals who have embellished and handed them down —are preserved and through reciting them, people can imaginatively partake in a wondrous communal space where past miracles can be matched to present needs. Reciting/reading turns into a mimetic and transformative action which taps into the secrets of immaterial entities whose energy still replenish and renovate the physical world.

Oraciones like that of Santa Marta (which could be the object of intriguing speculations that I am nevertheless forced to omit for lack of space) preserved through the centuries alternative and peripheral hagiographies. This *oración* re-evokes the saint's wondrous journeys and accomplishments and simultaneously asks for help from "another Marta" (*la otra Marta, no la Buena*, an expression curiously resembling the "I believe in God and in the other (lo otro)" some islanders would answer when I asked them if they thought of themselves as Catholics). The Santa Marta whose exploits are recounted in her famous *oración* was shaped conflating European and African legendary female characters. Her "prayer" conceals but somehow secures (for future reflections, researches and dis-coveries) the history of the encounter between three continents.

The words of the *oraciones* conflate past and present, space and time, and endow those who recite them with the power of past mythical entities (Dilley, 2004). Some prayers also feature Latin and Hebrew words and have been transmitted through grimoires like the Book of Saint Cyprian, extensively reprinted in South America throughout the nineteenth century (Davies, 2010). Those who used *oraciones* were not usually aware of the history of the magical books which circulated a creative mix of “learned” and “folk” magic for centuries. What was known was that *brujería* existed “because it is written” (*porque está escrita*), like the Bible, like authorities’ archives, like the textbooks used by the institutions in charge of formal education. The sounds of the prayers’ words imitated the sounds of natural and mythical worlds and the obscure formulas and languages of those who had *known* before. The written format spoke about *oraciones*’ importance, their antiquity, efficacy and their circulation.

Some *oraciones* were recommended for staunching the blood, others for protecting a traveler, but many were used differently by different individuals. Some of the “prayers” I was given were supposed to “protect” the body for some people and to “tame the bully” for others. The specific use of a prayer depended on individual interpretation, personal experience and interaction with other persons who had tried it before or heard about it. The *oraciones*, recited by heart or copied into notebooks and on loose sheets of papers, circulating within and outside villages, were both material and immaterial. The words scribbled on the paper, often full of grammar and spelling mistakes, carried the mark of successive cycles of re-writing, interpretations and of oral recitation. When recited, *oraciones* and *secretos* were said to be “put” (*poner, colocar*) on a person, as if, within ritual recitation, the encounter between human volition and spiritual forces turned them into objects/substances that could be incorporated. When they were kept inside the house or in purses they functioned like amulets.

Secretos are prayers which are handed down along the family line or through fictitious kinship. They were forever lost if the elders died before teaching them to the new generation. If “prayers” could circulate among friends, although with caution and discretion, *secretos* couldn’t be taught to anyone outside the family.

“It is a sin (revealing *secretos*). If I tell you them it is a sin. Only within the family (...) I could tell my kids, my grandchildren, to have a succession (“*Para que estuviera la consecución*”). If you tell anyone else the succession gets lost. Then awful things come to you, storms, ruin, scarcity, misery, our ancestors say...” (MA, Ararca, 2012)

The *consecución* preserved memory and the integrity of people who were related through shared substances, *crianza* and god-parenthood. Other prayers fostered relations outside the family and redistributed magic (thus, power) within the community and between different locations. Respect for the *consecución* meant granting continuity to the village and its families and continuing to share the protective and defensive knowledge which had preserved people’s lives against powerful groups and individuals.

The “passing down” of prayers was also considered indispensable for a person who knew *secretos*, in order to die peacefully. There were many stories about old villagers who agonized for days in their deathbeds because none of their relatives wanted to receive their *secretos*. Being a prayer’s (and thus, usually, a saint’s) devotee (*devoto*) entails allegiance to a particular entity, responsibility and acknowledgement of the existence of a heterodox and parallel mythical and ceremonial shadow-space. In a case I was recounted one of the village drunkards had to be brought to an agonizing person’s house and lured with some alcohol to be the recipient of the powerful words. A young woman told me once that her grandmother had revealed her that she was the chosen one,

among all her nieces and nephews, the one to whom she would pass her secrets. Her siblings, who were listening to our conversation, vehemently advised her to refuse. Señor Julio advised me not to become a “devotee” of a particular prayer or I could face serious problems in case nobody else knew or remembered its words. *Oraciones* sustain and link individual health, the integrity of a historically interstitial community and otherworldly peace. Transmission wove together various individuals and collective narratives. It reinforced social ties, binding the elderly and the young, the living and the dead.

The saints and the Island: local cults, hybrid saints

Once upon a time, people said in the village of Barú, the saints lived in the church. There were many of them and they were respected and well-kept. But a people’s stories are sung with different voices and notes. Other persons, therefore, like Señora Emilia, my landlady’s mother, said the saints had been only three, although weighed down with glittering offerings. Then the priests came, so most narrative threads go, either from Cartagena or from “abroad” and they took them away. The priests arrived, from distant or nearby cities, from as far as Germany, according to someone, and the saints were thrown into the sea. “*Ya no es tiempo para santos*” (“It’s not time for saints anymore”), the priest(s) declared^{xlix}.

I was puzzled by stories about thieving priests. In some cases the justification for these thefts was supposed to be a necessary refurbishment of the saint’s earthly body, like in the accounts of some women involved in the upkeep of catholic edifices in Barú and in Santa Ana. Even in Santa Ana, in fact, according to what I heard from Señora Rosalina, the brusque, dignified, almost blind woman who tended to the church in that village, the Santa Ana María standing on the main altar of the church and paraded through the village during the *fiesta patronal* was not the real Santa Ana. The original one, she whispered to me once, had been much bigger. She had been beautiful. Then a priest came and took it away to fix it but instead of giving it back to her devotees he brought back a slightly different Santa Ana María. Other Santaneros and Ararqueros confirmed this story. People had got used to the new Santa Ana and they loved her as well, but, truth be said, she was not the original one.

Conventional Christian symbols and icons, like the cross or a saint’s look, condense and hide the history of colonization, the relations of powers it spread and upheld, the encounters, the conflicts it fostered and the interpretations it encouraged. On one level, then, “*taking away*” expressed the acknowledgement of historical repression. Priests, which popular tradition often equates with *brujos*, profited from the poor’s rich, living cosmos. Other stories expressed the same feelings. Señora Esperanza, for example, told me in Ararca the story of a village girl whose body hadn’t been corrupted by death and whom the priests had wanted to buy from the family in order to “sell her as a saint” (*venderla como santa*).

Cartagena’s colonial religious authorities routinely sought to prohibit cults, dances, songs, which they reckoned as uncivilized, scandalous and blasphemous (Wade, 1997; Helg, 2011). The state, as in other Caribbean and Latin American countries, tried to outlaw or regulate, stigmatize and denounce black peoples’ religious practices and myths. Current evangelical crusades against saints’ devotion further defamed local saints’ cult and especially the private, individualized practices conducted within the household or without a (male) religious authority’s supervision. People had started to feel so intimidated by the idea that caring for the saints or “working” with them was equal to devil worship that they denied having ever kept a saint in their houses or declared to have

irremediably lost them. Individual and household losses strangely mirrored the priests' thefts. A Barulera used to tell me about a relative of her husband, who owned a miraculous *Virgencita* (Virgin Mary) and who was forced to get rid of her (or hide her) because people had started murmuring that she was a *bruja*. My long quest for a San Antonio is another example of these shifts. Old Señor Encarna kept on racking his brains, literally scratching his bald head with his long nails, trying to understand why the persons he had sent me to stubbornly denied having any acquaintance with the Saint or claimed to have cast a glance on his tonsured head for the last time in a faraway past. Pentecostal religious habitus, containing precise ideas on the legitimate relations one could establish with the divine, had become so widespread, had such an influence —on those who attended Pentecostal churches and on those who didn't —that people who simply thought they were following village "traditions" feared gossip and reprobation.

Local Saints

The *Virgen del Carmen* is many coastal villages' patroness. In Barú her feasts have been instituted, decades ago, by a particular woman, who lived in the Playón and had ties with a once powerful politician of the Conservative Party. One of the politician's female relatives also sponsored the construction of a niche for the Virgin in the Playón area. Her festivities were since then celebrated each July in that neighborhood. The *Virgen del Carmen* is associated with birth and with water. Seamen and other individuals who travel by sea use her prayer as a protection. I was told that I could try it before boarding the boat to or from Cartagena and that it could render innocuous the fierce December winds. The *Virgen del Carmen* featured in several seamen's and fishermen's stories. The most intriguing I heard recounted how some villagers, who were going through the ordeal of protracted and solitary floating, exposed to the sun, the winds and the waves, as they had ran out of gasoline, realized that a huge shark had approached their boat. After an endless night, during which the creature always kept a close distance, the men, who had obviously resorted to the help of the "queen of the sea", were astonished to spot a tank of fuel, gently approaching them on the tip of the waves. As they got hold of it the shark swished back inside the sea. When the men went back to the village they paid for a feast in honor of the *Virgen*, as it's common for survivors of such adventures, and recounted how the Queen herself, evoked through her words, had come to rescue them in the shape of one of her creatures, a fish, and only left when she wasn't needed anymore. The *Virgen del Carmen*'s prayer was also traditionally used by midwives. It's part of their knowledge. Many persons had witnessed how her prayer had eased a difficult birth.

It is tempting to associate her with *Yemayah*, who also reigns over birth and water. Nevertheless it must be remembered that in various European regions, and especially in the Mediterranean, the Virgin Mary is almost always associated with the same events and elements. The *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, Cuba's patroness, has the same characteristics. I have seen her worshipped in the house of fishermen from Isla Margarita, in Venezuela and remembered that some Baruleros had experiences of fishing with Margariteños around the Islands of Rosario. Saints have travelled, readjusted, converted and spun relationships, like human beings, across and around the Caribbean Sea.

Then there was San Antonio. He did not have a place in the church either but some people told strange things about him. Others, when I retold those stories, seemed embarrassed and tried to minimize them. I had been trying to find someone who still kept a San Antonio. San Antonios had been used for tracking lost objects and animals, especially pigs, and performed other services, either willingly or by force, for their "owners". Then Señor Encarna, with his raucous laughter, informed me that San Antonio

was a *maríca* (slang for homosexual man). He had in fact, like a woman, given birth to a little son (San Antonio of Padua is usually represented with a baby Jesus in his arms). For Esperanza, who had several kids, alive and dead, and who couldn't stop howling with laughter every time she recounted the Saint's story, what was hilarious was that the Saint had ripped off his hair (He is usually represented with a monkish tonsure) while giving birth. "*Pa' parir un hijo!* She would repeat over and over slapping her knees and swinging with laughter. From that moment on birth-giving, which had been a male business, became a female domain, she told me.

San Antonio has a long history of associations with fertility and femaleness in Southern Europe. In Italy San Antonio of Padua and Saint Antonio Abate (the "abbot", hermit and exorcist) often conflate into a single extraordinary being who grants children, helps women, outwits God himself with cunning tricks and is also associated with fire, graves, the dead and other ambiguous female creatures. In some old Sicilian folktales a mysterious and beneficial character called "*l'abatino*" (little abbot) travels between the world of the dead and that of the living through wells and other gates. Even in Latin America the saint is the subject and the product of transformations and fantastic recreations. In Cuba and parts of Brazil he is identified with *Exu/Eleggua*, the *orisha* trickster (Agier, 2002b). David Guss (2000) described the cult of San Antonio among the Afro-Venezuelans of Sanare. In local oral history the saint had wondrous adventures in Africa and in Sicily, talked to the animals and performed songs and dances which tamed the "Moors". Sanare's San Antonio is *morenito* ("brownish"), a product of *mestizaje*, the member of a new creole race. He is betwixt and between distinct geographical locations and social categories. In the island, San Antonio crossed other borders as well. He infringed the social and physical borders between maleness and femaleness, holiness and profanity. A host of intriguing associations, juxtapositions and confluences, too lengthy for the present research, link the saint with stories of people asking him to trace their lost pigs, with pig-raising as an essential activity of local economy in the past, with stories of stolen and retrieved (often in cemeteries) sows, with sows' ambiguity as animals into which *brujas* often turn, with death and fertility¹.

Bad saints do exist. But they do not have a place in the church. They do not have a proper anniversary day. San Bartolo for instance is a "devil" and a *brujo*. He does have a date of birthday, the 23th of August, but he spends it drunken and unconscious, as Jesus Christ punishes him each year for his rebelliousness. When he wakes up from his *borrachera* (state of stupor), on the 24th, he asks for his birthday party. He realizes he has been tricked again and lest out wind and tumultuous thunder. People who knew the story usually laughed when they told it and re-created with their voices the drunken saint's expectations and his subsequent discontent. Other Baruleros remembered when some men used to fashion for themselves frightening costumes and, making rattling sounds, they would walk through the village at night. Children were terrified and even most adults didn't dare to go out late in the evenings, as masquerades apart, the elders said, on the eve of the 24th of August, the Devil himself would walk around the village.

When I heard about San Bartolo I immediately thought about Changó. His name in Yoruba means "rebellious" and he is thought of as a defiant, but often comical, entity. In some stories, especially in the Americas, he is associated with the trickster Eshú and in others he has to dress up like a woman to escape incumbent dangers. The *cumpleaño de santo* is an important element of saints' cult in Afro-American religions like the Cuban Santería and I have found at least a story in which an *orisha* (*Inle*) misses his birthday-party because he is tricked into excessive drinking. San Antonio (and the Devil) is associated with Eshú/Legba in some parts of Brazil (Agier, 2002b) and with San

Bartolomé in others. The latter is also sometimes associated with baby Changó. Saints like San Antonio and San Bartolo or like the Anima Sola, whose characteristics bring him close to Eshú, are flexible, ever-transforming creatures that epitomized contact, movement, negotiation and change (Agier, 2002b). The structure of Afro-American religions—which do not always distinguish between singular and plural (Eshú is one and many, see Wafer, 1991) —accommodates transgender-ism and a baffling idea of identity, whereby showing simultaneously means hiding other forms and potentialities.

Nevertheless any researcher who exults in following the saints' trail back to Africa via the Atlantic Ocean and its beads of land scattered around the American continent is dumbfounded to discover that San Bartolomé, an exorcist for the official hagiographers, turned into a *brujo* in Spanish popular culture, following the same logics ensuring that, in Barú or in the Mediterranean, someone who *knows* how to deal with devilish creatures also *knows* about evil itself much more than the binary rhetoric of official Christianity is willing to accept.

Thinking about and through “African-ness” and magic is more difficult than it might seem. “Roots”, for instance, could reveal themselves as “knots”. Consider the word “*zángano*”. When I first heard it I immediately associated it with the word *zancada* (“leap” or huge “stride”). *Zánganos* were said to move with huge steps from a place to another or to walk incredibly fast. Moreover, a *zángano* is also a lazy individual, a parasite, a person who lets the other work for him. When people recounted the adventure of men who *knew* they laughed at the magical tricks these used to ease daily work. Their sexual abilities and potency also had interesting assonances with common beliefs about “drones”(male bees, also *zánganos*). In the Dominican Republic sorcerers are sometimes called *gangas* and in 1940s Cuba *ngangas* were magical objects or ghosts of deceased *brujos* (Cabrera, 1993). Del Castillo/Mathieu (1984), who decades ago, did linguistic researches in Palenque de San Basilio, where people still preserve a Creole language which features African elements, argues that *zángano* was related to the Bantu “*nganga*” (sorcerer and spirit). Are we then talking about an “African” survival?

Lavinia Fiori, an anthropologist from Bogota who had done fieldwork in the Amazon, thought she recognized in the stories of famous *zánganos*' taking giant steps in order to move from a village to another an Amazonian myth (The Arawaks and the “Caribs” who inhabited the coastal regions of Northern South-America were thought to have migrated in a faraway past from the Amazonian regions) The indigenous elements, then, could complicate the African heritage hypothesis. Things get even more complicated if the already mentioned Diego López' testimony during his unfortunate dealings with the Spanish inquisition, when this *mulato* had called the Devil a *zángano*. Furthermore, Spanish folklore and what's left from the trials instituted against alleged XVII and XVIII century Iberian *brujas* recorded that *brujas* wanting to travel to a gathering with their companions(the *sabbath*, according to the accusers) were said to utter a charm which ended in “*a la zanga nomás!*” in order to initiate their flights (Baroja, 2003). “*Zanga*”, according to the Real Academia Española, refers to a game of cards and is a term associated with Andalucía, the Spanish region from which gave Cartagena most of its European-born inhabitants. And “game” (or *ludus*, in Latin) is a word which was commonly used to indicate the magical meetings, feasts, and ceremonies so many peasants, across Europe, claimed to have participated in (Muraro,2006; Ginzburg,2008; Magliocco, 2004; Wilby, 2006;2010).The popular European element further dilutes (or enriches) a language, and a set of narratives, which aren't fossilized but dynamic and shaped through interpretations and creative transformations. Popular etymologies work through imaginative and creative semantic and iconic associations. They are built by narratives practices and cycles of interpretation^{li}.

The borders between *brujería*, Catholic devotion, “tradition”, and story-telling are slippery and blurred. The ambivalence, flexibility and polyphony of a vibrant religious syncretism opened up venues, *caminos*, for various kinds of social allegiances and for the multiple manifestations of a “shape-shifting” identity.

“She was alive!”: the May Cross, memory, transformation and continuity

The cult of the May cross was once widespread in the villages of the Bay. Even Cartagena sported an old stone cross, said to come from “Colonial times” for which people had a great veneration. Aline Helg (2011) mentions the preoccupation of colonial authority for a cult of the Cross in seventeenth century Tolú, where a wooden one was customarily adorned with ribbons and jewels and celebrated with “unorthodox” songs that caused embarrassment to the authorities. Esperanza told me that in Ararca, before the missionaries arrived, bringing ideas about what a proper saint ought to be, Ararqueros had gathered, on the third of May, by a wooden cross. She, other girls and adult men and women would create musical instruments out of common objects and sing *fandangos* by the cross. People drank, danced and sung. Other villagers still remembered that the May Cross had been the Patroness of most *corregimientos* of the Bay, in the past.

Many historical and literary sources document the importance of the Cross in pre-Columbian contexts. The cross, an arboreal symbol, was equated with *Yaxché*, the tree of Life, among the Mayas. Crosses were said to stand on the territory of Cuzco before the arrival of Spaniards. The Arawak inhabiting the Caribbean regions of what is now Venezuela held special dances, the *areítos*, which were performed in May, when the Southern Cross appeared in the sky, and which were said to propitiate the rains. The indigenous later thought that the priests had “pulled down” that constellation from the sky and turned into a wooden cross (Novo, 2011). Hanks (2010) refers to similar ideas when writing about the Mayas and their incorporation of Christian concepts into their religiosity: the priests had been able to “lower” the Cross, identified with tree-like divinities and usually cut from the forests of which Maya spirits were custodians, to “their” altar.

Indigenous reverence towards certain trees struck the colonizers and their scribes, often religious men, when they reached the Northern Coast of what is now Colombia. Fray Pedro Simón wrote about indigenous people’s veneration for a *guayacán* tree, located near Tolú, the same village where, more than a hundred years later, the authorities would frown upon the extravagant celebrations of the May Cross feast. Tolú’s tree had faced a mysterious journey, like Santa Ana María and other local saints, and undergone a metamorphosis. The “priests” had stolen it and then brought it back. From that moment, despite looking like the same tree, it had turned into something else. He had turned into San Simón. The Zenú villagers continued to look after him but recognized that they had been “cheated” (*engañados*) (Drexler, 2002). Drexler (2002) has recorded various stories concerning alleged “living saints” (*santos vivos*) among the *Zenues* of San Andrés de Sotavento (Cordoba), a town located within a region the black peasants of the Bay had frequent contacts with. He recorded that certain saints, like the *Santica* (this is also the affectionate way in which Baruleros call their saint) of Peñon Petacá, were found in the *monte*, subsequently stolen by the whites and eventually came back to their land.

Priestly greediness and magical powers also featured in the story of the May Cross as the patroness of Barú. The patronal feast was once the most important event of the year, together with Carnival and the Holy Week, and although it continues to be celebrated, has lost the splendor the elders said it possessed when it was financed by the village wealthy and organized by devote villagers.

There were different versions of the Cross' story in the village. Some people said it was found by the harbor, under a palm tree, others mentioned the *monte* and other still the *Playita de los Muertos*. There, according to the dominant version, which educational and religious institutions strove to promote as *the* tradition, the cacique "Barú", found inside an accidentally smashed jar a wooden cross that Spanish religious men had brought with them from their continent. Thanks to the aid of this miraculous Cross, it was said, the Indigenous won a battle against the Spaniards, which was fought in the *Playón del Triunfo*. This story echoes many other Latin American legends of patrons and patronesses whose images were allegedly found by indigenous or black peasants and later turned into national symbols. In such stories the natives make the Christian symbols theirs and are in turn changed by them.

Señor Nestor, though, warned me. Don't let yourself be fooled by these people, he advised. Nobody really knew about the indigenous, he would say. The story of the Cross was different. The Cross had been *alive* (*viva*). She had been a black woman, a *morenita*. According to Señor Nestor, once, the war, the same war which was tearing apart the whole country, came to Barú. The liberals and the conservatives battled against each other near the *Playón del Triunfo*. The liberal captain asked the villagers who their saint was and visited the May Cross in the church to ask for protection. Later, during the battle, a mysterious black woman appeared among the soldiers. For some Baruleros she acted as a nurse for the wounded. According to others she distributed water to the thirsty. Others seem to remember she gave out weapons to the rebels. The liberals won the battle with only two casualties. The stole that usually hung from the horizontal beams of the Cross was found wet with perspiration, a sign that the Saint had truly participated in the battle.

This episode, which few people mentioned, and which I had interpreted as a symbolic re-appropriation of history, an "us"-story that lumped together distinct episodes of struggles and resistance, hid a real historical event. I in fact discovered that the liberal José María Samper wrote, in his memories of the civil war of the 1880s, fought between the more "radical" fringes of liberal party and the conservatives and the rest of the liberals, united in the "National Party" fostered by President Nuñez—a Cartagenero remembered as the man who "sold off" Panama—about the liberal rebels who had hidden near Barú. From the island they controlled the transit of food and other agricultural products between the *estancias* which surrounded the city and the city itself. They also had access to the intricate channels that connected the island with the Sinú region and with the Bay of Cartagena. The rebels, a red cross on their flag, helped by the "humble" (Samper, 1885) fishermen and peasants, repelled the attack (also waged from a warship suggestively called "Colombia") and thus "won the battle", although the civil war was, in the end, the National Party's triumph.

Other villagers did not mention the battle of 1885 but an anonymous "war", being fought somewhere else and that didn't touch the island, thanks to her patroness. I wonder if theirs isn't a reference to the famous "Battle of Barú", which took place in 1708 off the Islands of Rosario between the Spanish galleons guided by Captain Casa Alegre, loaded with the riches of the colonies, and the English pirates commanded by Wager and based in Jamaica. Both the Spanish and the English used to hide near Barú and landed on its shore to make provisions and get water and it is likely that the islanders had contacts with them, as they historically had with many other smugglers, deserters and "dodgy" traders. Another version of the story of the Cross had, I think, preserved the memory of 1774-1779 forced settlement campaigns, which had brought to the foundation of Santa Ana, from then on the Island's official administrative center. In these stories the Cross helped Baruleros, in a moment in which they were being pursued by the city's authorities, guided through the marshes and the *monte* by Santaneros themselves!

The stories of the May Cross' appearance, disappearance, return and miraculous deeds were memory making and memory circulating tools. They were reminders of the importance of the village, of its strategic geographical and economical position. They were reminders of local saints' wondrous powers, especially of those with whom reciprocally satisfying relations had been entertained, and of the continuity between social, natural and supernatural world in the Island. The Cross was allegedly found, in the distinct versions, on the beach or in the *monte*, places from which human work draws out sustenance, forms of sociability, and magic.

The Cross, everybody said, was "alive". She wasn't a *cruz de palo* (a wooden cross). She was a woman, a black, or *morenita* saint (as the San Antonio described by Guss[2000]), or a *virgencita*, a tiny black virgin. The priests had tried to take her away but their boat couldn't get out of the *caños* and into the open sea. In another version the priests had succeeded and had later brought back this other Saint, who stood in the church and whom everybody loved, but who wasn't the "real" one.

Señor Enrique had another conclusion for the Story of the Cross. The priests had taken it away but she had returned to her village. Since her return she had remained in the village, he insisted. And she was hidden. When I asked him if he referred to the wooden cross, dressed in blue, paraded by women around the village during the May celebrations, he laughed. I couldn't see the real one, he replied, but she was there, paraded with the other, but hidden inside the small platform used for the procession. The only way to see her was going to the house of those who kept it. She mentioned a woman I often chatted with, the leader of a group of women who looked after the Catholic Church. She, the *jefa* (boss), was the one who knew where the *Santica* was, he suggested. I was baffled. Was he suggesting that the "real" saint was being hidden inside the icon exposed in the church, like it often happens with *orishas* and saints in Brazil or Cuba? Or was he talking metaphorically? Was he talking about a vision (*visión*), as he had done when recounting stories about encounters with *brujas*?

Javier Ocampo (2008) reported, in his book on Colombian folklore, Tomas Carrasquilla's (*costeño* writer, supposedly inspired by local black traditions) piece about the *Familiar*^{liii}, a small puppet (*muñequito*) that certain people were said to fabricate and animate by whispering secret words into his ears. It had to be kept secret, "hidden" or "covered" and it could only to be seen with a candle, even in day-light. This literary reference reminded me of Samuel Cuadros, a deceased and well-remembered village smuggler, shopkeeper and man who *knew*, who was said to keep *muñecos* in his house. Only people who went to his place, I was told, could see them. These kinds of *muñecos* were also associated with Haiti by those who had traveled through the Caribbean. I also remembered that the Afro-Venezuelan population of Chuao —an ancient coastal black village which had been once part of an extensive cocoa plantation and that I had visited during my fieldwork —had, until some decades ago, after the official feasts of San Juan, held other, minor processions, mainly organized and performed by women, who paraded through the streets of the village small *muñecos* which, for the rest of the year, were kept inside their houses (Alemán, 1998).

Stories and ideas about the May Cross in Barú could hide similar practices. They probably did, at least in the past. But the importance of the alternative narratives about the May Cross does not reside solely on the similarities they trace with other Afro-American contexts, although these associations, these *connections*, are crucial for thinking about the complexity of identity, of origins, of belonging, in times of ethnic identity politics and of struggles waged around the imputed culture or cultureless-ness of various Afro-American peoples. These are not trivial details. They are signals, clues which point towards directions and roads which the tradition-making institutions (groups related to the

Catholic Church, the school, government-sponsored groups) fail to take into consideration. And it couldn't be otherwise. The official version of the Story of the Cross, that which attempts to link its discovery with the conversion of the Indigenous people of the Island, mirrors a plethora of other, widespread, foundational religious and nationalistic myths. It serves to integrate Islanders into the nation's collective imagination, into its reportoirs of symbols and of origins stories.

Outside the linear and smooth contours and paths of official narratives, other stories branch out, corroding, destabilizing, con-founding (and so, implicitly, finding and re-founding origins and belonging). These stories talk about the leader of a female church group with the same linguistic devices used to talk about learning and teaching *brujas* and their secret schools. They question priests' motives and turn their *knowledge* into an ambiguous asset. They suggest the possibility that the Saint, too, although a native, like other natives, might have come from abroad and, *at the same time*, from the land, from the *monte*. The *Santica* is from here because she came from somewhere else and she stayed (or she had to go away but *knew* how to come back), fostering alliances, protecting, turning into kin. The tension between movement and retreat, which, as we have seen, permeates so much of the Island's sociality, of its identity and history, also shapes its religious and magical scapes, its phantasmagoric territory. The *Santica* was found and thrived at the junction between the village and the *monte*. She helped villagers in occasions in which people from outside the island threatened its survival. She is *morenita*, an ambiguous adjective which can mean black and not so black, and have different connotations for different individuals, suggesting an affinity between a people, a territory and a Saint which lives and moves between physical, social and spiritual worlds. She represents the resistance and resilience, the continuity of a people and of its socio-geographical space, a trans-territory invested by historical currents of power, shaped by contact, forced and voluntary movement and re-territorialization.

Wardle (2014) has argued that the shape of the cross is always suggestive of possibilities, of alternative paths, of compromises between "horizontal" egalitarian practices and "vertical", hierarchical structures. The cross efficaciously symbolizes the encounter and the blending of different spiritual^{liii} traditions into "compromising formations" (Ginzburg, 2008). Crossroads are Eshú's and Elegguá's domains: they are the domains of divine tricksters, those who open up roads and possibilities, re-shuffling, blending, confounding. The cross can also be a powerful symbol of the history of a people who lived in-between distinct social and geographical spaces and which in the margins, at the cross-roads, sought to find some freedom and autonomy.

People can work with the saints and the saints can work for a person or for a whole village. The agencies of humans and of saints often coalesce. The difference between human and non-human desires and needs can be blurred. This cosmological indeterminacy, this continuous dissolution and co-construction of borders has, as its social, geographical and historical counterpart, the Island's interstitial position. Saints mimic islanders and walk and sail on their paths. Saints bring together spaces, peoples, different time frames. Saints move and are moved, they are stolen, they come back. They refuse to get out and into the Bay. They get in lost at sea, just like, in a *bullerengue* from Barú, fishermen get lost while fishing on their boat.

The *unofficial* stories of the Cross, the half-told, half-hidden secret of its return, are narratives about a people's resilience. They are stories about hope, which unfolds through the entanglement of endurance and transformation. No matter who else came with the last wave of people from outside, whether dodgy entrepreneurs or mysterious individuals who have left severed heads within the increasingly fenced *monte*. If the Cross (and so, somehow, the powerful past), is still "there"—under church garments and

respectable polish, a black, tiny (and female) figurine, which knows how to grow and fill *her* whole village — her power can be retrieved and deployed again.

^{xxiv} Popular Neighbourhood of Caracas. It is divided into various sub-sectors. Many Colombians, and especially *costeños*, live there.

^{xxv} “Envy” and the *daños* that this is believed to generate has been explained as a reflection of a desire to maintain a social balance, equality and justice within the community. It has also been related to an idea of the “limited good” in traditional societies, whereby a person’s increased fortunes is considered a reduction of the other’s wealth or of their opportunities. See, for instance, Reichel-Dolmatoff (2013).

^{xxvi} See Martinez Alier(1989), who makes a similar point for colonial Cuba, and RT Smith(2013)

^{xxvii} When referring to “masculinity” I follow Connell’s (and Viveros Vigoya’s [2002]) “semiotic approach”, according to which masculinity is (re-) created, in discourses and performances, through a “system of symbolic differences”, a “system of interconnected symbols”.

^{xxviii} Following Viveros Vigoya (2002) and Connell (2005)

^{xxix} See Sobó(1993) for similar models of bodily functions in other Caribbean contexts.

^{xxx} Even in other Caribbean contexts, for instance in Jamaica, living together in the same house, especially after a pregnancy has been announced or has become visible, constitutes a sort of “rite of passage” into adulthood. (Wardle, personal communication).

^{xxxi} Gilmore (1978) created an interesting “provisional typology” of gossip in his research on a Spanish village social life. He distinguishes, among other things, between gossip in which the main actor is perceived as the community in general and more individualized forms of gossip in which clear actors can be distinguished. Typologies are by force strategic delimitations and reification of more fluid processes. I noted, for instance, that a conversation which had started with relatively anonymous general gossiping could gradually point at specific individuals and, vice versa, ambiguity could be put on specific actors and their actions. These dynamics are contextual and depend on the participants involved. It would be worth researching, I often thought, the role of the ethnographer as gossipee and gossip and as initiator and collector of gossip. The ethnographer is somehow a trickster. With words, silences, choices, gazes, she actively participated in community dynamics, with sometimes dramatic effects.

^{xxxii} It was not only that young girls, for instance, recognised that “things could be demanded” (*pedir*), by suggesting certain forms of compensation. There were various, more concrete cases. For various reasons I have kept them out of my thesis. It was not uncommon to hear that very young girls, in one case even a ten years old one, had sexual exchanges with adult men for small sums of money. Sometimes the ICBF (Colombian Institute of Family Wellbeing) intervened.

^{xxxiii} See Tabet (2004) for a discussion of “prostitution” along the same lines, in various ethnographic contexts.

^{xxxiv} Douglas (in Kapferer, 2002) made a distinction between sorcery and witchcraft but also recognized that the two were not mutually exclusive.

^{xxxv} Afro-American peoples played a major role in the development of early 20th century Pentecostalism

^{xxxvi} It was founded in 1939 by the Danish missionary Aksel Verner Larsen

^{xxxvii} Note that *comer* (“eating”), is the local expression for having sexual intercourse.

^{xxxviii} Creatures that, all over Colombia, are said to inhabit ponds and marshes. They resemble human beings and, in fact, they can take any person’s shape, thus confounding the individuals who meet them. *Mohanes* are sterile

creatures and hence try to steal children from human beings. There is an interesting assonance between the term which was used to denote indigenous shamans, the “*mohanes*”, and the “*mohanes*” or “*mojanes*” who inhabit the wilderness, especially if we consider the overlapping between magicians or *brujos* and magical creatures or *aparatos* of stories about *brujeria*. In this case *mohanes*’ sterility would assume other intriguing connotations. Things and people associate with the Devil or with black magic are often considered unfruitful, somehow “barren”. It would be worth to explore the matter further.

^{xxxix} *Zánganos* are associated with extraordinary sexual abilities even in other, geographically close, contexts. In Panama and Venezuela a *zangano* or a *zangaretón* are entities who can force women to sleep with them. In the neighbouring Department of Córdoba, *zanganos* can modify the length of their sexual organs to satisfy their partners’ tastes (Valencia).

^{xl} Much more could be said about Cartagena’s and about the Island’s Devil. I heard various stories of devil pacts and of encounters with the devil. It is a fascinating topic that I was forced to eliminate from this dissertation for lack of space but that I hope to develop further.

^{xli} The son of Guillermo Valencia, a renowned *costeño* story-teller, once told to a journalist of the “Universal” that the *brujas* of the Gulf of Morosquillo, in the past, were said to learn from a “divine” female entity called Cholele, appearing as half-indigenous and half-black woman. These curious blends are intriguing and would deserve other inquiries. See *El Universal*, 23-05-2010.

^{xlii} While I was writing this I read for the second time a book about Sicilian (Aeolian Islands) equivalent of *brujería*, written by the Italian anthropologist Macrina Maffei (2008). Many of the stories the author heard and collected resemble those I listened to while in the field. Some women flew and deceived or bewitched their husbands; women joined other women and travelled to distant places, went fishing or had fun together. The social context she studied was one in which female unsupervised movement was usually stigmatized. Some months ago (2014) I got hold of Maffei’s new book (“*Donne di mare*”, 2013, Pungitopo). In it the author talks about the extraordinary work women performed in the islands. They went fishing in groups, they sailed to other island and ports in order to sell their produce, and they cultivated the land and gathered herbs. Many elderly individuals remember what women routinely did in the past but official, even local, history has always neglected, almost erased these stories. Maffei tries to relate the (abundant) stories of journeying witches with the lack of recognition and diffusion of the real journeying women’s ones. Similar considerations could apply to Barú.

^{xliii} Other ethnographies seem to point towards the direction of all-female social formations. Female secret societies in West Africa, I recently discovered, used male drummers for their ceremonies. See, for instance, Briffault.

^{xliv} See Lecoteaux (2003) for an examination of northern-European witches’ shape-shifting but, virtually, any text about European witchcraft needs to deal with accusations or/ and allegations of shape-shifting: for instance, Ginzburg (2013), Pocs (1999), etc.

^{xlv} Salt was also used, in the past, during Catholic Baptism, together with Holy Water. Perhaps these elements constitute reminders of its ceremonial importance.

^{xlvi} People talk about magical *aparatos* that are also considered part of Antioquia’s lore. The *mechona* or *cabelluda*, a supernatural female apparition whose face is always covered by her hair and who can walk incredibly fast has assonances with the *bruja* (Ocampo, 2008).

^{xlvii} Wardle (personal communication) made me notice the association between dampness/water, Mohanes and death. In Jamaica spirits are said to be “wet”.

^{xlviii} Jesus and Mary can be invoked and celebrated as saints. Santa María, Santo Cristo, etc.

^{xlix} According to other villagers it had been some thieves’ (*bandidos*) fault: they had come through the sea and took away the saints and bells (as Moors were said to do in some Southern European tales).

ⁱ While I was writing this dissertation I came across extraordinary pieces of information which might shed light on *Baruleros'* ideas. I learned that Beatriz de Kimpa Vita, a XVIII century Congolese woman and member of local aristocracy, founded a religious cult in which Catholicism and local spirituality merged. Possessed by San Antonio, *turned into* San Antonio, the woman and her *little saints*, her followers, successfully spread their view that San Antonio himself had been born in Africa and made him the focus of their practices. Beatriz was burned at the stake but her followers, even after her death, preserved the idea that only San Antonio's last earthly incarnation had been destroyed by the fire but that his essence had lived on, ready to occupy another body. One of the most astonishing elements of this series of events, recounted by Thornton (1998), is that San Antonio-Beatriz had a large entourage of female followers. San Antonio was supposed to cure female sterility. He/She him/herself had a child. How it was possible that San Antonio, a male saint, had been given birth to a child was one of the first questions colonial authorities asked Beatriz when she was apprehended. She and her followers answered it was a sacred, divine mystery. Thornton rightly notes that these and other religious and spiritual notions and stories could have travelled across the ocean. The *marica* Saint could be a faded shred of memory torn from a wider story. See, also, Hauchschild and Guss for legends about San Antonio and their association with magic in Italy and in Venezuela. Jacopo da Varazze's *Legenda Aurea*, immensely famous during the Middle Age, contains other interesting elements.

ⁱⁱ The case of the "*pajaro macuá*" is similar. It was another example of the *africanismos* of the *Costa* that Del Castillo-Mathieu (1984) collected. Some people are (still) said to possess a magical bird, which is kept in a box, *must be given food and drinks*, and grants to his owner (usually a man) an extraordinary sexual potency. Many villagers have heard of people whose success with women was attributed to the *macuá*. Most claimed that the bird lived among the indigenous in the Sierra Nevada (interestingly De Mello e Souza (2004) talks about the "Brazilian" *bemtevi* a similar magical bird, said to dwell in the forest with the *indios*) and that getting hold of this animal (or in some cases of his nest or his feathers) was an almost impossible but highly rewarding endeavor. Del Castillo-Mathieu (1984) related the term *macuá* to Bantu and to a language of current Mozambique. Even in this case popular European elements complicate the picture. When I felt sure about *macuá's* "African-ness", perhaps bolstered and interpreted through "indigenous" ideas, I came across an excerpt from *Malleus Maleficarum*, on which the demonologists Sprengler and Institoris, acknowledging the Devil's exceptional sexual skills, wrote that it is "commonly known" that witches use to collect "penises", keeping them in the "nest of birds or inside a box, within which they move as living members, eating oat or other things"(in Maffei, p. 62).

ⁱⁱⁱ Usually a helping spirit but, in some Latin American regions (for example Argentina or Bolivia) the Devil.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Remember also that cross-roads are associated with magic in Europe since the late antiquity. Hecate Trivia, goddess of, among other things, magic, was worshipped at the crossroads. Eshú and Elegguá are in Afro-American religions, Lords of the Crossroads.



“Todo pasa y todo queda,
Pero lo nuestro es pasar,
Pasar haciendo caminos,
Caminos sobre el mar.[...]
Caminante no hay camino
Se hace camino al andar”
Antonio Machado

“I call ethnography a meditative vehicle because we come to it neither as to a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action, nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different journey.”

Stephen A. Tyler, *Post-modern Ethnography: from document of the Occult to occult document*

Camino a Barú: Conclusions



Ararca and the Road seen from the hill located above my landlady's house

The state of fieldwork roads, Dimitri Dalakoglou (2010) suggests, has often been considered a signal of the adequateness of particular research locations. Bad roads or the lack of roads, in fact, have sometimes been made to emblemize the “traditional”,

“unspoiled” societies early anthropology regarded as adequate research settings. I am writing in a historical moment in which many of social sciences’ dichotomist assumptions and presumptions of objectivity have been questioned, their links with colonial epistemologies and practices often exposed and analysed. Yet, while struggling with this dissertation, and, before, trying to cope with often overwhelming emotions and with the perceptive “crowdedness” of fieldwork, I found myself reflecting on the road which was being constructed in the island. While doing fieldwork I started thinking about the ways in which road-planning and road-building seemed to alter Ararca and Barú, about the alleys and byroads and alternative paths the Road had started to cover and the issues it had uncoiled behind by eyes. After fieldwork the still uncompleted road seemed to mirror the difficulties of my piecing together different topics, historical periods and loosely interconnected spaces.

I spent a lot of time on the road. In Ararca I lived by the road and I saw it coming, its pitch black tongue swishing closer and closer. I travelled between Ararca, Santa Ana and Barú on the back seat of moto-taxis and on the occasional jolting *busetas* (small buses). I had roadside conversations and I had conversations about the road itself and about many other material and metaphorical paths the road which was about to come from the City would uncover or bury under the asphalt. While writing I started entertaining the idea that the Road could be a useful tool for reflecting on the task of assembling a coherent text. The image of the road, the road as a symbol and a signal, metaphor and metonymy, helped me to highlight and trace points of contact, affinities, and possible articulations between the various issues.

The road seemed “good to think with”. Gender identities could be performed and contested on the road. The mirage of the road had prompted discussions in which different visions of the kind of place the Island could or would probably be were weighed and voiced. Its construction had started to unearth memories about islanders’ past interactions, sociality and conflicts. By the Road-side bizarre accidents involving *aparatos*, drivers and walkers occurred, puzzling the inhabitants of the Island just before the end of my fieldwork. And the road and the projects associated with it had brought within the island vehicles, individuals, organizations and rumours through which essential dynamics and themes of local life and history could be explored. Femininity and masculinity, local forms of relatedness, magic, evangelization, community and identity-making processes would be somehow “spatialized” and located at some point on the road which was being built. The road had not been initiated upon the islanders’ explicit request. But most villagers, while preoccupied about its impact, had not challenged its construction either and were hoping it could bring new opportunities. This double movement, this top-down and bottom-up emplacement of economic interests, historical relations and emotions, also reminded me of the post-structuralist turn ethnographic inquiry started to bend more explicitly towards after the publication of “Writing culture”. I got the feeling that I could have struggled forever to find a couple of technical terms or social categories around which to weave my own narrative, but I would not be able to avoid personal choices, emotional resonances and above all I could not escape taking responsibility for the particular path I had cut.

When fighting with words, images, memories, when moving back and forwards across space and time and looking for a way to turn experiences into a text, I found myself trapped within the quagmires of linguistic and academic requisites for precise delimitations, specializations and for –post-structuralism notwithstanding–the coherence, correspondence and symmetry I often felt were required from me. The only way out was carving out a path, neither exhaustive nor seamless, in order to navigate through and

around issues which, while walking, and when looking back, appeared as conjunctions, *nodal points* in a network of interconnected themes and places.

When I started my research I could find few studies about afro-Caribbean populations in Colombia. Most were written from an historical perspective and they have been invaluable sources for my work. The rare ethnographies I could find were usually related to development or, especially in the case of the villages of the Montes de Maria, violence and post-conflict reconciliation. It seems, despite the changes in the way culture has been defined and made sense of in the last decades, that many anthropologists still assume that Afro-American culture, in Colombia, belongs to other regions and social groups. I had to open a path while walking and I learned not be afraid of mingling with other disciplines and of intersecting the routes traced by researchers of other Caribbean areas. In fact I consider that bringing back the continental Caribbean, either Colombian or Venezuelan, within the sphere of Caribbean studies, could enrich our comprehension of the region, which has been historically constructed through social interactions and through multi-nodal networks of exchanges.

Different paths converge on the Road, although they do not exhaust all the possibilities for walking, all the possible journeys. Mine is an attempt to bring together, partially and transitorily, what I gave and was given at determinate spatial and temporal conjunctions. It is a plausible but partial, conflictive and also, inevitably, imaginative account. Like its metaphorical (and magical) counterpart, the Road, it simultaneously gives people, processes and places a certain directionality (regulating transit, although uneasily and intermittently) and subtracts alternatives to the eyesight.

A place shaped by movement and rootedness

Anthropologists and cultural geographers like Escobar (2001), Massey (1994), Harvey (2005), Hoesbart (2011), Gupta and Ferguson (1992) and, also, from different perspectives, feminist black and Chicano authors like bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), scholars like Homi Bhaba (1994) and theorists of “coloniality” like Mignolo (2002) and Quijano (2000), have tried to throw light on how places/territories /localities are constructed and reproduced through multiple linkages and spatiotemporal relations with other places. Consequently, ideas of identity, alterity and community are negotiated, contested and performed within complex and power-filled polyphonic systems.

I have used movement and mobility as a lens through which it is possible to look at some of the facets of social life in the island. Tracking movements —of people, entities, objects, ideas, images—allowed me to better represent, despite writing’s inherent characteristics, fixing, preserving, ossifying—a multifaceted, complex, living world. By following movements, journeys and various connecting and disconnecting processes and practices, the history of the networks of relations which made the island a distinctive place becomes visible and helps us to understand current social change. History materializes, in villagers’ stories, at certain spatio-temporal junctions. Memory, imagination and emotions link old and current territorial disputes or the vanquished *sindicatos* of yesterday with the aborted attempts to form unions and grassroots associations today.

The tension between movement and rootedness, between “being part of” and “standing apart”, is crucial to the ways in which Baruleros and Ararqueros speak about themselves, about local relatedness, about being a woman or a man, a villager or a Cartagenero. Discourses and stories about movement and retreat can also be considered as *ordering* and *dis-ordering* narratives, as they attempt to make sense, to categorize, to define and, in different moments and contexts, to create ambiguity, to open up possibilities and alternatives for self- and community definition and for the construction

and reproduction of various kinds of allegiances. They engage at various levels with the rhetoric about order and unruliness of dominant institutions, with the hegemonic discourses which buttress and regulate the entrance into the Order of the State and of the state-sponsored corporative interests.

Historical movements of the highest magnitude have shaped the island's trans-territory and its inhabitants' sociality. The transatlantic movements of western modernity, first of all the "Conquest", with its military, political and economic apparatuses, with commerce and slavery, with its racial and sexual economies and the attempts to categorize and govern spaces and individuals; the slow incorporation into the Colombian State and into the global capitalist arena, with their ensuing counter-reactions, struggles, conflicts and negotiations: these and other related processes have influenced the development of certain forms of sociality, of certain ways of inhabiting place and a gendered body, of defining community, communality and difference. The island, furthermore, has occupied for a long time a liminal geographical and social position. It has been close and remote, neglected but central to various economic practices, port and refuge, city and province, continent and island. Villagers narrated its history as a sequence of "arrivals". In people's tales and memories movement is a crucial foundational theme. Even "origins" stories are spun by references to fleeing and retreating, arriving and coming back.

Islanders have been able to juggle and alternate withdrawal, and some autonomy with intense and multiple interactions. While participating in the often exploitative and divisive networks of hegemonic economic projects they have been able to preserve for centuries a profound relationship with the land, to create and reinforce social ties characterized by empathy, flexibility, acceptance, to foster and maintain reciprocity with non-human forces and to accommodate memories of abuse and of resistance, daily creativity and hope within an increasingly shrinking space of manoeuvre. Life in the margins, in the interstices of the colonial and national worlds, provided islanders with some freedom, with the chance, especially in certain historical moments and in some parts of the territory, to foster relevant connections with other peoples and places or to deny allegiances and escape institutional control.

But interstitiality and marginality have also been perceived and are narrated as isolation, neglect and abandonment. Fragmentation, dispersion and contradictions characterize islanders' stories and memories. Like villagers' quest for freedom and their capacity to juggle with identity, these features are related to their distance from the centres of power which strive to produce and disseminate apparently coherent and seamless discourses about the past, about identity and belonging, or about the future. I have sometimes intentionally used the words "peripheral" and "peripheries", alternating them with "interstitiality" and "marginality", in order to underscore, as the etymology of the word suggests, the circular quality of the relation between central institutions and peripheral territories in Cartagena's region. As Margarita Serje (2005) argued in her work on the *revés* (other side, inner side) of the nation, peripheral territories have infused life into the centre. They have nourished the centre throughout their history with natural resources and human labour. They have functioned as reflecting mirrors, spaces of projection, their exotic life or their emptiness serving the interests of those who wrote the dominant narratives about the nation.

Movement and mobility are also about establishing connections and about disconnecting, severing ties, denying recognition, obedience and support. Baruleros and Ararqueros managed distance and closeness and created and narrated "communality" and social identity in various ways. I have heard from several individuals that being a "native", a Barulero or an Ararquero, meant living and working in the villages and, above all, having children who are born in the island. This idea simultaneously links indigeneity

and belonging with the land and with the fostering of appropriate forms of sociality. It subtracts it to the domain of biology, to that of unspoiled “traditions” or to the caged realm of an allegedly pristine culture. Being native is about ensuring a future for the island, about ensuring the continuity of its social world. Villagers’ identity, their sense of “communality”, were similarly expressed by their use of the land and by their relationship with it, by their sharing of food, work, time and of certain spaces, by their commitment to the value of *consecución*, of the continuity of a vibrant social cosmos. Villagers also fostered interactions with people living in other places, constructing a rich network of relationships with other villages of the Bay and with other spaces of the Caribbean region. Some, moreover, engaged in sustained relationships with people coming from other social classes, sometimes turning them into fictitious kin. This practices has facilitated the progressive encroachment over the island’s territory of individuals who later played a substantial role in the process of dispossession of its inhabitants.

The growing inequality and the atmosphere of distress created by decades of land-grabbing and land claims have dramatically marked the island. Social change, primarily manifested in development, is articulating places and social groups in novel ways, encouraging and strengthening certain sets of linkages and detachments. Social change can be conceived of as “movement” and many islanders talked about it in these terms. First of all, the rhetoric of development works by tracking and paving roads. It works with the language of linear progress, by creating the illusion of a horizon towards which people are incited to walk, if they don’t want to be left behind. Village rumours, which are primarily used to manage distance and closeness, often reinstated con-fusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, into these discourses. Rumours magically materialized contradictions, counter-reflections, counter-ideas. They often did so by transposing current and long-standing concerns into the world of fantasy and of imagination.

Social change, moreover, prompts people to think about what “goes away” and what “comes”. Development-related events may turn into spaces where certain memories can be retrieved and the past scanned and re-constructed in order to face and understand the present. Re-ethnicization and development are radically altering the Island’s landscape, producing events and spaces where the disjunction or the connections between past and present can be exploited for collective memory, identity and community making. The “pro-indiviso” use of land, the experience gained while traveling, working and interacting with diverse social groups, the sociality of *Semana Santa* and of funeral wakes, the passing down of protective secrets and medical, religious and magical knowledge, the *crianza*, the art of making kin and creating supporting networks amid scarcity: these are only some of the features which an increasingly commoditizing concept of “cultural heritage”, promoted by government and non-governmental actors, fails to evoke and highlight. They are embodied practices which express cultural values and, often, alternative views of the world. If they can disclose the power relations and the subversion of the past they may also help to envision future paths and journeys.

Local forms of relatedness

The historical experience of the *rochela* has profoundly shaped villagers’ sociality. This is particularly evident in the village of Barú. The *rochela* accommodated commonality and difference, movement and rootedness, *estancias* and *rozas*, negotiating and “opening paths” and abandoning them to the ever-growing, concealing and sheltering *monte*.

The *rochela*, as a geographical and social formation, combined retreat and autonomy with the nurturing of a particular kind of inner and outward oriented sociality. *Rochelas* had strong racial distinctiveness but race was not the only agglomerating factor within those peripheral communities. Black, white, indigenous and mestizo farmers, runaways, landless and poor individuals: they all were concerned with carving out a space of autonomy, as removed as possible from the control of authorities and institutions but they created and maintained a network of commercial, familial and spiritual relationships. What if the *rochela* became a model for thinking about identity and community? A hypothetical *rochela* model would not need to posit unchanging “traditions” or an always consistent, intelligible and clearly articulated regime of collective memory as the basis of culture, community or of political struggle. Such a model would not exclusively prioritize race as a community making device, although the experience of living in a world in which inequality is created through the construction of dominant racial and sexual orders has contributed to give *rochelas* their form and their value. The *rochela* could help people to imagine, visualize, experience and recount commonality in ways which would enrich the arena of current ethnicity-based identity politics and problematize some of its dogmas. “Community” could then mean shared interests in the perpetuation of a physical, social and spiritual multi-territory which the new order of state-sponsored global capitalism cannot completely incorporate and transform into another Cartagena. It would entail opposing the horizontal violence which creates distance, distrust, tension and competition, in the relationships with other grassroots political movements. It could be epitomized by the sharing of common spaces, activities and multi-faceted memories, by resilience and by conscious, autonomous, cooperative transformation.

Villagers expressed the tension between “being part of” and “being apart”, different, autonomous, or unruly, in various ways. There are linguistic expressions which are suited to incorporate the flexible domains of belonging, solidarity and profiteering, whose shifting borders are materialized by other inclusive or restricting movements and narrations, which reinterpret one’s and other people’s position and motives. Take, for instance, the expression “*colaborar*”. It is used at various levels and in diverse contexts. It can refer to the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, to those between men and women, to those between *patrones* and employees or between NGOs’ workers and police officers and certain villagers. *Colaborar* is an equivocal term. It can imply sharing, working with someone for the common good or guided by a moral principle and norms of reciprocity. But it can also mean working for one’s own interest through the engagement, the association and the strategic interaction with another subject, as when the employees of rich *patrones* are accused of supporting their employers’ interests, even against those of other villagers and relatives, in order to retain their protection and support. A villager, for example, could “collaborate” with the coordinator of a local *fundación*, by helping out with the implementation of a program, by providing physical spaces for the storage of equipment or for meetings or by distributing leaflets or information. If questioned about the reasons of his “collaboration”, he would probably say that this was dictated by his desire to improve village life or to help other villagers or by the obligations he felt towards individuals who had become friends. In such a case it would be very common to hear rumours or outright accusations about his real motives, about his personal gains and about his faulty redistribution of valuable information, opportunities and goods. This has become a very common pattern with the entrance into the island of a host of organizations but, when looking at the history of islanders’ relations with individuals pertaining to other social groups, it can be re-discovered in other

historical moments and with other actors. Although these dynamics can be considered as inherent characteristics of social life, they assume a particular relevance in a “black” enclave of the ambiguously represented and narrated *Costa*, where a people whose origins and whose foundational myths are constituted by a series of displacements, shaped throughout the centuries a society which flourished in-between the flows, the arrangements (the *ordering* practices), the dictates and the rituals of dominant institutions and by fostering interactions with other marginal, quasi-similar actors or by entering into strategic arrangements with powerful individuals pertaining to other social groups.

The dividing line between *colaborar* and being *corruptos*, is thin and can be reinforced or softened through rumours or explicit accusations. A corrupt individual is a “crooked” person, one who has been twisted out of shape or of place, who is double-faced and double-dealing. The *corrupto* confounds belonging and alterity. He constructs them in ways which change the social landscape and which make it unacceptable or unrecognizable to his fellow villagers. The tension between intimacy and betrayal, identity and alterity, participation and fusion or con-fusion can be considered an inescapable component of human relatedness, but I felt that in Barú and Ararca it was a foundational theme. It structured and coloured social interactions. As an echo, it reverberated, it reflected back the sounds, the clashes and the tunes of the past, in slightly warped forms and along winding trajectories. It was part of a balancing act, of the structuring and fracturing themes of the social groups which have been constituted as unequal subjects by dominant powers through dispersion, fragmentation and dislocation. Development is unquestionably emphasizing and exacerbating the narratives and conflicts revolving around the precarious balance between inclusion and loyalty and otherness and treacherousness.

Local kinship is an open-ended (Wardle, 2004), flexible, system of relationships constructed throughout time and across spaces. I have underscored the importance of *crianza*, through which meaningful connections bypassing biological relations are created, social continuity is ensured, experience positively valued and handed down as some kind of inheritance. *Crianza* constitutes a levelling, re-distributing practice, although it sometimes provokes ruptures and conflicts. God-parenthood has been a vital element of local sociality for a long time. It was the kin-making, protective, defensive and adaptive strategy of an uprooted people. It also has opened up venues for social advancement.

Other ways of establishing connections and creating community within and beyond the island are now getting more and more common. Within the new religious communities, for example, intimate relationships are created and cultivated, together with new hierarchies, obligations and norms of reciprocity. Evangelical churches produce discourses about the ideal family and reinforce the view of the nuclear family as the natural model for familial relatedness, while substituting some of its structures and functions.

Witchcraft and interpersonal relations share the same domain. I found Mary Douglas’ ideas about the border-defining role of witchcraft in relatively flexible and open societies pertinent for my own research. Rumours and stories about witchcraft give shape and structure to indefinite feelings and to social exchanges and interactions. In interpreting, representing the other, they define and construe the self. Witchcraft deals with social transformation. It operates in the spaces in-between. It unfolds and works between places, social groups, persons and temporalities. It works with movement. It creates connections and it severs them, helping to remember, to hide, and to forget. In the chapter on Pentecostalism I have used Austin-Broos’(1987) expression “gapping and

filling”, which the author employs in order to reflect on evangelical management of cognitive dissonance. “Gapping and filling” can be used to illuminate some of the mechanisms with which witchcraft works. Through ignoring, abandoning, forgetting or, conversely, echoing, underscoring, re-remembering and recreating, bewitched and bewitching people can fill and close the spaces between individual and groups or open up roads and clear the terrain for future interactions and for future “walking”.

When islanders talked about disorder, they referred to various and sometimes interconnected phenomena. “Disorder” gave shape to perceptions of abrupt or undergoing change and of accelerated social fragmentation. Disorder was also about ruptures with and fissures in the traditional gender and generational hierarchies. At the same time, disorder also meant unruliness, non-compliance with the ideology of dominant institutions. Such counterhegemonic values are sometimes difficult to discern, because they are expressed in the language of dominant institutions. The incorporation into a state-sponsored global capitalist arena has been accompanied by novel attempts to order, sanction, regulate and repress patterns and spaces of socialities, relational forms, gender performances and narrative constructions, with, for the moment, contradictory results.

Gender ideology and local masculinities and femininities

Investigating the historical construction of specific localities without paying attention to their gender constructs has serious consequences. Dirlik, cited by Arturo Escobar (2001), wrote that the dismissal of gender, class or, for example, religious affiliation in studies of place-making can turn these and similar social categories into “instruments of hegemony”. It is important, then, to look at the ways in which gender, as a “set of interconnected and hierarchically organized symbols” (Viveros Vigoya, 2002) has been deployed in different historical moments in order to buttress unequal social orders, political hegemony and colonial and imperial economic projects. The colonial order and the order of the liberal and neo-liberal state, with their sexual and racial economies, have (re-)produced subjects who were (and are) unequal, differently positioned and variously entitled to autonomy and to self-realization.

Gender is inextricably connected to other social categories, like race, class, age, or political affiliation. Henrietta Moore wrote that:

“The lived experience of gender is that it is already class, already race or ethnicity, there is no means of extracting gender from race or class or any of the differences through which people construct a sense of self and engage with the world” (Moore, 1994: p.23)

In my experience, when villagers talked about certain features of heterosexual relationships they also talked about class and race. In various occasions gossip concerning girls coming from particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods who had fallen out with their male partners, attributed the breakup to the boys’ unwillingness to share their life with women who were “ignorant”, “*narigonas*” (big-nosed) or “*boconas*” (big-mouthed). The last terms had clear racial and sexual overtones and their contextual usage spoke about distinct class positions and attributions, even within such small social settings. As in Cartagena, race is a mute, silenced, but ubiquitous part of social relations. Sexuality and race, particularly, are usually spoken of in conjunction and race also shows up in

discourses about economic power and conflicts, although partially hidden and diluted with images and linguistic formulas which also pertain to the semantic field of “class”.

Local gender ideology can be read through the lens of movement and mobility. “Moving on”, the development processes which should allegedly bring forth social advancement and progress, affect women and men in different ways. Fundamental historical processes contribute to create relational forms and social structures within which men and women occupy unequal positions and are endowed with distinct possibilities. Female and male journeys and disconnecting and connecting practices shaped local femininities and masculinities. Local gender ideology and arrangements gave men and women unequal entitlements to movement and to the narration of movement, silencing histories of contacts, affiliations, adventures and valuable female experience. This is why stories about female travelling helped me to visualize the clefts between gender ideology, expectations and lived experience.

Gender is an essential constitutive element of new local religious communities and of religious mediation in itself. It is also one of the strongest, most durable, visible and simultaneously flexible threads through which the icons, activities, memories filling up the ambiguous and hybrid regions between magic and religion which some people defined as *lo Otro*, are woven together and interpreted. *Brujería* has somehow preserved the memory of ancient female practices, values and world-views. It apparently reproduced dominant ideas about men and women but it also subverted them through ambiguity, silences and secrecy, linguistic manoeuvres and alternative narrative practices. *Brujería* insinuated doubts. It produced fissures in local ideology, opening up “vents” for ventilating (Daly, 1984) difference of experience, perceptions and interpretations. It, similarly, produced noncompliant and, sometimes, dis-quieting ruptures with the academic models which have stubbornly denied for a long time the vitality and the semi-autonomous or counterhegemonic character of widespread magical/spiritual practices, especially in their women-cantered versions. *Brujería* suggests that female unruliness, other facets and spaces of sociality, other spaces of manoeuvre, have existed and, perhaps, “still exist”.

Religious mediation and new religious communities

Mediation is an intrinsic and constitutive part of religious experience. I have relied on Birgit Myer’s (2009) work on new religious communities, which is centred on the identity-making processes fostered by particular styles of mediation, which simultaneously shape subjects and communities.

It is difficult to overestimate the relevance Pentecostalism assumes for the researcher who struggles to make sense of current social dynamics in popular Cartagena. Few researchers nevertheless have given the due attention to the role new religious communities play in the construction of places and multi-territoriality. Pentecostalism (and especially the new waves of Pentecostalism which since the seventies have invested the Latin American continent), is a lens through which a host of crucial social themes can be explored. Pentecostalism reshapes trans-territoriality insofar as it brings together, it gathers in specific localities, images, peoples, objects and representations originating in different geographical regions.

Pentecostalism is related to interstitiality and liminality at various levels. It deals with individual and collective crises and transformations. The status of some of its religious authorities and adherents is sometimes ambiguous and contradictory rumours circulate about their lives and deeds. Pentecostalism incorporates popular spirituality but claims to incarnate a break with the religiosity of the past. It places a great emphasis on

emotions, spontaneity, orality, bodily sensations, using them as tools for the creation of identity and community. It combines the wondrous with aspirations and claims to modernity and progress, the ideology of *empresas* with biblical parables, miracles and exorcism.

Pentecostalism transformed the island by changing the ways in which people thought about communality and family, represented the past, roots and origins, expressed ideas about the transcendental and about the relationships which is possible to entertain with non-humans, with the wondrous and the divine. Pentecostalism is shaping alternative discourses about gender and heterosexual relationships and it is influencing local performances of gender identity.

Pentecostalism simultaneously “binds” and liberates. It allows personal and collective quests for autonomy and meaning to disentangle from national mythologies which have offered little space for autonomy to marginalized and exploited social groups. In this sense Pentecostalism provides a more straightforward, inclusive and, perhaps, less distressing alternative to the ethnic route of “multicultural” states. In fact, constitutional changes notwithstanding, people often perceived in the new structures of post law 70 Republic the same lack of accountability, opacity, and “corruption” that have tainted other political institutions and processes. Pentecostal organization also stands in contrast to a Catholic Church which has been historically perceived, especially its hierarchies, as a coercive institution, linked with conservative attitudes and hegemonic interests and which has abandoned and neglected peripheral territories and dismissed or persecuted their inhabitants’ experiences and values.

But local evangelism was also a (re-) binding force. It ordered evangelical villagers’ experiences and perceptions. It *tied* villagers to other allegiances and obligations, to other norms and structures of authority, to other rituals, foundational themes and constitutive narratives. It offered liminal spaces for the rehearsal of alternative subjectivities and of alternative gender performances. It created, not without causing hostility, contradictory results and ruptures, communities within and out of the village community, inevitably and uncertainly changing its physical and social landscape.

The Phantasmagorical space

Historical, geographical and social interstitiality had its correspondent cosmology. It translated into a certain kind of spirituality and religiosity, into a distinctive “phantasmagorical space” (Kapferer, 2002), a territory of magic, imagination, enchantment, a space of mysteries crafted through historical “meta-cosmologies”: the results of blending, merging and associative processes through which ideas, images and icons pertaining to different systems are brought together and related. Diverse sources feed and nurture local phantasmagorical space. Some are personal, other historical, some circulate through the media, other are to be found within the territories peoples inhabited or along the routes on which they “walked”. The island’s phantasmagorical space runs parallel to and is woven in and out of its physical territory. Like the island’s social and geographical space it is made of interrelations and it is made through spatiotemporal associations with multiple “territories of the strange” (Kapferer, 2002). Peoples, interactions, events, processes, journeys, landscapes, life experiences, music and films are some of the sources from and through which phantasmagorical trans-territoriality is experienced, expressed, narrated and remembered.

Like Suzanne Greenwood’s “Otherworld” (2009), with which can be somehow compared, Barú’s phantasmagorical space is simultaneously internal and external, material and virtual. It unfolds in the fissures of catholic ceremonies and of its relational world. It posits magic as a “normal” occurrence but baptises it “*lo otro*”. And knowing

about *lo otro* mark some people and some groups as special. It is local and trans-territorial. It safeguards the past and buttresses people's resilience with shape-shifting. It is recounted as tradition but it is born out of con-fusion, mimesis and equivocation. It is a kingdom in-between populated by travelling entities, ideas and images and in which the maker and the made, the evoker and the evoked are always about to merge.

Syncretic objects, stories, images, entities and verbal expressions—a *zángano*, a fabulous bird, a living Cross, a multiform and sometimes pitiable Devil—hide and reveal, dilute and preserve social and spiritual relations, bodily practices and the experience of dis-encounters, domination and disobedience. Syncretic religiosity exposes and re-combines the multiple social identifications and many-faceted subjectivities of transatlantic discontinuities and the “interstitial sociality” (Losonczy, 2002) of the Caribbean. *Brujería* engages and works with the tension between change and continuity. It deals with facets of local sociality whose dangers and potentialities are often muted or difficult to visualize. It then make them disappear again with secrecy, ambiguity, with the conflicting voices of polyphonic stories, with a choreography of movements and transformations which seem to negate traditions, the existence of a common spiritual habitus and continuity. On the contrary, *brujería* is a *system* of values, beliefs and practices which manifests an extraordinary resilience and it suggests the existence of a common and semi-autonomous spiritual and religious landscape, although one shaped by unequal power relations, clashes and compromises.

Stories and narrative practices

Throughout the thesis, I tried to give a prominent space to narratives and narration. Stories are crafted from personal and collective experience but simultaneously give form to experience. In producing coherence and meaning and structuring experience itself, they have crucial world-making (Ochs and Capps, 1996) effects. Stories are interactive, relational elaborations and attend to identity-making and self-construction needs.

Formal, organized and/or recurrent narrative events are privileged arena for the relay of official versions of important events. They are occasions in which traditions are shaped and reproduced through the performance and the validation of authoritative/hegemonic memories, as it happens with the May Cross celebrations in Barú. But, sometimes, official narrative practices can also constitute scenarios within which what constitute “tradition” can be re-negotiated, enlarged or modified and contested, and alternative stories, versions and values can seep into accredited narrative repertoires.

Informal story-telling has not often been given the consideration it deserves. The kind of story-telling I have experienced uncoils within the gaps of official identity performance. It is carried out by people to whom few state employees, NGO workers or, even, researchers interested in “cultural heritage” ask if they have anything to say and to share. It takes time for a researcher to step out of the mandatory routes of official narrators and memory-keepers. Even marginal communities (marginal with respect to what is portrayed and celebrated as national or regional culture) have official and authoritative narrators. Their visibility often prevents researchers from moving out of the circuit which others have followed before. With time, courage, and with some creative juggling between individuals and family obligations, personal sympathies and first impressions which easily turn into habits and perceptive filters, it is possible to move out of the paths of approved story and memory-making.

Women are often non-official story tellers. I had to learn to listen to them, though. I had to learn to relate to persons who do not even realize, or cannot always express that

they have stories to tell or that their narratives, despite contradictions, lack of precise temporal referents and, often, a mixture of more realistic and fantastic elements, are passionate, enjoyable, dramatic chronicles which constitute History. Contradictions and flexibility, moreover, turn these bits of stories, life experiences and quasi-rumours into precious resources for reflecting on the polyphony of time and memory and on the ways in which power works, at many levels, through linguistic oppression.

Stories meet and interact in places but not all the stories can be heard or voiced. Narrative entitlements are not equally distributed. Telling “untold” or “under-told” stories (Levins Morales, 1999) is a way to democratize story-telling itself and its inherent identity and community-making mechanisms and to construct complex and multi-chromatic representations of places, communities and identities. Furthermore, telling untold or under-told stories “heals” (in Levins Morales ‘words and following the etymology of the verb, which means to make “whole” again). It reconstitutes, at least temporarily, the identities and subjectivities of marginalized individuals and groups, opposing the fragmentation and the “creative destruction” of domination and prevarication.

Aurora Levins Morales also wrote that “centering women” (*ibid*), moving them back to the centre of historical processes and enquiries, “changes the landscape” (p.26). Similar considerations can be made for other social categories, like race or religious affiliation. Stories have place (re-) making effects because social (and physical or phantasmagorical) landscapes, their shapes, borders and texture, appear radically and magically different, ancient and novel, limited and rich of possibilities, when they are evoked and recreated by the voices which had been trapped into the fuzzy undergrowth of ground noise.

I will go back to the road for the last time. By the end of my fieldwork, the road outside Emilia’s house had been cut open and controversies related to past grievances, anticipated chances and the losses involved had come out of the ground. The road, standing in a metaphorical and metonymical relation with development, modernity, self-care and prosperity, was magic. It hid and materialized. It suggested linearity, inevitable progress, but it hid other intentions and alternative routes. If, when inquiring about the island’s saints I had believed to discern the *Orishas* behind their catholic cloaks and in their unorthodox demeanour, by the end of my fieldwork I had the bizarre impression that Eshú, the divine trickster, had metamorphosed, as old *zánganos* did, into a feature of the landscape. He had turned into the Road, the Camino a Barú.

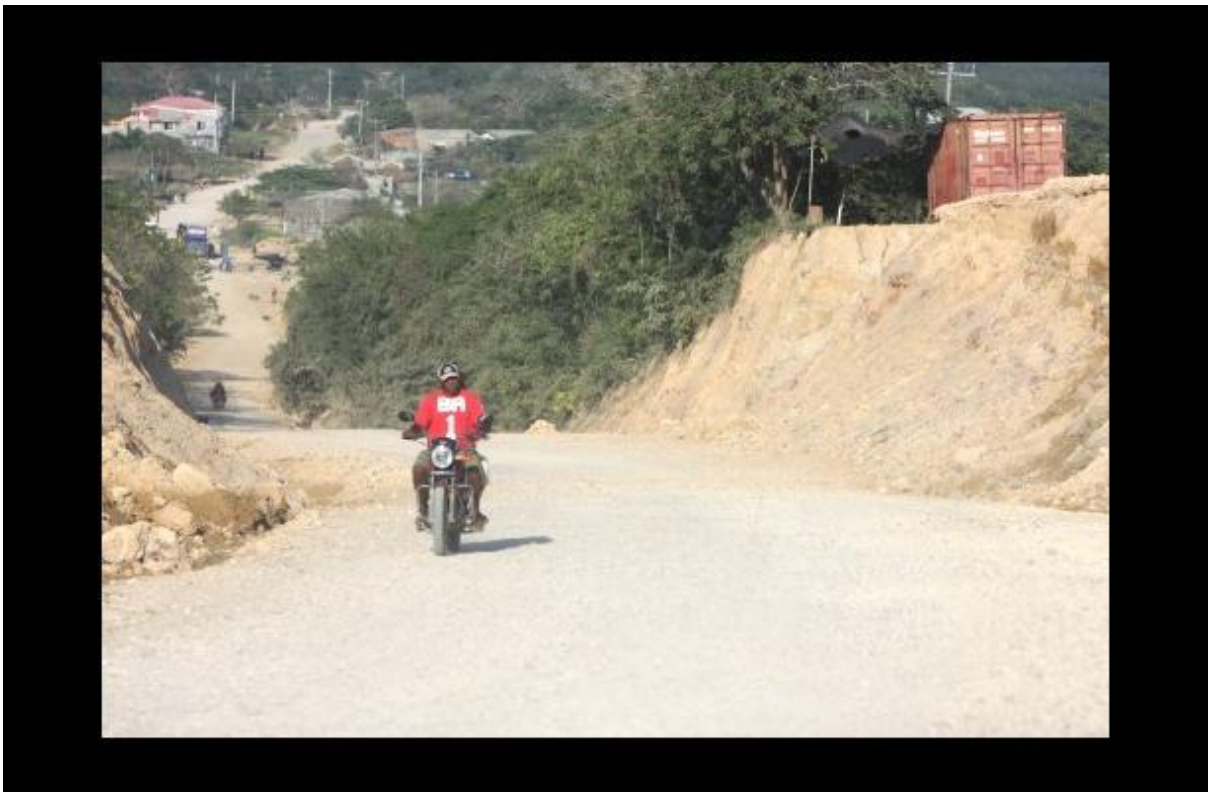
Eleguá/Eshú, like all the *Orishas*—and even more, since He is the Lord of Roads and of the Crossroads— has numerous “paths” (*caminos*), spatial and temporal pathways in which he assumes diverse shapes, crossing between genders and ages and entertaining various adventures. Eleguá/Eshú is a trickster Orisha. Some *reglas* (spiritual traditions) maintain that there are two different entities, Eshú and Eleguá, others that they are the same entity with a different name or two sides of the same Orisha. In this last case Eleguá is said to live in the houses while Eshú, his dark, wilder brother, lives just outside the door.

Similarly, doubleness and liminality characterised the Road. It embodied an awe-inspiring but treacherous and unpredictable transformation, creation and destruction, connections and disconnections over which people, nowadays, had little control. It stood for progress and incorporation into a modern economic system, into a new order and into the growing city but at the same time it suggested dangers and losses: of identity, of safety, of autonomy, of natural features, of memory and—since car and motorcycle

accidents had become more and more common as the Road started to grow—of villagers’ lives.

Magic works with space and time compression, with associations and contact. I am conscious that the Road might have fooled me as well. When it was still a dirt track, for instance, by linking my personal memories of other places, roads and journeys with the present and by presenting me with an intriguing and vibrant picture of the connections and differences between Cartagena and some of its Bay *corregimientos*, it had convinced me that the island was the right fieldwork setting for my research. Later, while I was writing and re-membering, it suggested assonances and similarities. It materialized junctions and crossroads, around which I opened up a provisional path, a *trocha*, a *camino*. It is not the only possible one.

Beware the trickster. He seems to be conveying a message but he does it in cryptic ways. The road can confuse and entangle like the *monte* used to, only in a different way. Some people, in the island, were very cautious with the apparent mono-directionality and inevitability of the Road. Others were confident they were still “walking”, but did not pay attention, I feared, to the myriad of constraints which directed, influenced and limited their journey.



Picture taken from eluniversal.com.co

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A Photographic Journey



The Bay: going towards Cartagena at dawn



Isla de Barú. Allí se cuenta la leyenda de la Santa Cruz”

“Aquí en el medio del mar se encuentra la



Ararca, the Road, the Monte



smuggling

Baru: House built during the golden times of



Baru: Playa de los Muertos



Ararca: Monte, roza, playon



coal.

Barú: horno para hacer carbón. Making



church function.

Barú: culto de barrio. Neighbourhood



of the New Road, 2012

Ararca: Sign advertising the construction



Baru: IPUC before the restructuring works



village feasts

Santa Ana: Santa Ana Maria during the



Baru: Feast of the May Cross



Baru: The May Cross inside the Church



Ararca: Coquito. The ancient hacienda's lime oven



Baru: "Se venden minutos". Rebusque



Ararca: Casa de la Cultura.



Ararca: Casa de la Cultura.



birthday party.

Baru: IPUC: Fiesta de quince. Fifteenth



Baru: The harbor.



Ararca: the new road



Baru. Burras work hard.



players'shack

Ararca: the main road and the domino



Ararca: Chenny Bar



Baru: Children's dance class



Ararca. Something has changed.



Baru: the pico' and the drums.



Ararca: Rebusque. Making pancitos.



Baru: learning to dance cumbia.

Re-telling and remembering. Nestor Cortes Baru.



History as legacy and as a project. Esperanza Villeros, Ararca



Nicolasa Hernandez, Ararca.



With Señor Julio, Barú.



Papa Encarna sits where the streets and the winds meet, Barú.



Baru: near the harbour.



to the islands.

Bazurto, Cartagena: back



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