

**(RE)VOICING, (RE)VIEWING, (RE)INSCRIBING AND HEALING THE FUTURE:
EXPLORING THE QUESTION OF LIBERATION THROUGH BLACK WOMEN'S
ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY AFRO-COLOMBIAN SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS**

by

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My investigation exposes and analyzes the ways in which Afro-Colombian women activists are conceptualizing new forms of liberation and freedom through writing, music, and filmmaking in contemporary Afro-Colombian social movements within the very spaces of social death and racial and political violence in which they reside. My dissertation consists of seven chapters that examine how these written, sonic and visual forms of artistry act as vessels for worldmaking that carry out the mission of creating a new, universal human as defined by Sylvia Wynter. In the first three chapters of my dissertation, I lay the groundwork for my exploration of Afro-Colombian women's art by providing background on this sector of social movements and artistry as well as my own theory on (re)voicing, (re)viewing, and (re)inscribing as it pertains to Afro-Colombian women's art and Wynter's humanizing mission. In chapter four, I look at the 2012 drama film *Chocó* and a documentary film on *alabado* singers, *Voces de Resistencia*. In chapter five, I break down the music of two female Afro-Colombian hip-hop artists, Cynthia Montaña and Gloria "Goyo" Martínez. In chapter six, I discuss Úrsula Mena Lozano's study on Afro-Colombian poetry, *Indicios para leer el amor en la poesía negra chocoana* and Hazel Robinson Abraham's novel *No Give Up, Maan, ¡No te rindas!* Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude my findings on how Afro-Colombian women's artistry can indeed lead to healing.

Ultimately, my dissertation lends itself as a contribution to the growing scholarship on modern-day Afro-Colombian social movements, the artistic genres that have stemmed from it in the last few decades, and the question of being, Blackness, and womanhood on an international stage. This project brings together works that have never been discussed before in the context of Sylvia Wynter's human, thus shedding new light on the ways in which we can conceive of this art as more than sociopolitical protest, but as a healing, lifechanging, worldview-altering force for positivity and ontological freedom.

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**1.0 Introduction: Blackness in Colombia (or The Hills Of Hebron Transcended): Sylvia
Wynter's *Race Substance Of The Nonhuman***

“Fearing confrontations, we take refuge in claptrap phrases like ‘racial harmony.’ Racial harmony, and, even more important, cultural harmony, cultural fusion can only come out of a high degree of awareness. Awareness calls for honesty of intention and expression”

Sylvia Wynter¹

“The part of her mind which was secret and cunning accepted that she would have to pretend to practice rites which the others used to assure a reality from which she had escaped. For the others were not without power. If they demanded her involvement in their conspiracy, she needed them in hers”

Sylvia Wynter²

Jamaican intellectual Sylvia Wynter’s 1962 novel, *The Hills of Hebron*, tells the story of a fictional rural and secluded Black Jamaican community. They strive for freedom and self-sufficiency under the leadership of the church elder, Obadiah, who continues the mission and work of the late founder and prophet, Moses, so that the meek—in this case, the citizens of Hebron—may inherit the Earth, or at least, be able to successfully survive on it. However, when a divine punishment befalls the congregation and a drought leaves the community destitute and in complete poverty, the structure of this imagined utopia starts to unravel. In 2017, in another realm of Black storytelling, Afro-Colombian *cantadores*³ from the Bojayá-Bellavista region of Chocó sing and create healing amongst their communities in the wake of a church bombing that killed and injured hundreds in their community. This grief, mourning, and healing process is captured in the

¹ “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together” (32).

² *The Hills of Hebron* (5).

³ The term *cantadores* refers to women and men who sing a traditional style of Afro-Colombian song originating from the Pacific Coastal region of Colombia known as *alabados*. Originally functioning as funerary songs, this musical style has been used to express messages of protest, resistance and alternative forms of world-making. See chapter 4 of this dissertation for a more in-depth history of *alabados*.

documentary *Voces de Resistencia*. So, what do these stories have in common? Their similarities go beyond simply being global Black narratives shared in different artistic mediums. Rather, what deserves some focus here is the space of the Christian church as a structure to imitate or transform. In *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter poignantly illustrates how the structures and mechanisms of hierarchy, control, and the power of a dominant Eurocentric Western narrative completely warp perspectives of humanity to label darker-skinned populations as nonhuman, non-citizen, and completely alien, while the ideal human is defined as white, male, and economically advanced. Almost as a precursor to the deep and complicated work Wynter would produce on her concept of the human, which will be discussed in detail in the coming paragraphs, the author also foreshadows in her novel the deep sense of inevitable failure that nonhumans experience when trying to humanize themselves by imitating Eurocentric structures of being. However, the *cantadoras del Pogue*—almost as if they were taking Sylvia Wynter up on her offer to see beyond our current state of being in the world—convert the Christian church into a space of meeting, *comadreando*,⁴ defiance, and healing to create their own version of themselves. Just like Aunt Kate, a key character in Wynter’s novel, one can say that in their own way, the *cantadora* de Pogue “pretend[s] to practice rites which the others used to assure a reality from which she had escaped.” More specifically, in *The Hills of Hebron*, Aunt Kate believes that her daughter, who many years ago drowned in a spring near her home, is still alive and is sleeping at the bottom of the small body of water. Others in her community have assumed that this tremendous loss has negatively affected

⁴ *Comadreando* is often translated to English as “gossiping,” however, in the context of protest and resistance movements, *comadreando* can be seen as a strategic tool for planning and sharing ideas as well as a space for emotional healing. As Stephen Kingsley Scott points out, “everyday events of comadreando enact rituals of commiseration that build mutual trust and sympathy (*confianza*) between women and the households they head. But when figured in public health projects, they become vehicles of a broader politics of commiseration, one that aims to forge reliable channels of trust, goodwill, and sympathetic understanding between neighborhood actors and the state” (4). See “The Politics of Commiseration: On the Communicative Labors of ‘Co-Mothering in El Alto’” for a more detailed explanation of *comadreando* in the context of politics and protest.

her mental health, or perhaps, this is just her way of being in denial and coping. However, what if Aunt Kate were not mentally ill, but engaging in a different reality that others did not have the ability to see or imagine yet? What if Kate was simply playing along, giving into the notion of a current realm of thinking/being/knowing that would inevitably frame her as a grieving mother gone mad instead of a woman with a different, developing sense of knowledge and being? The fact that Wynter refers to both Kate's way of thinking and the perceived reality of others that surround her as conspiracies would suggest that neither constitutes the one true reality and that both are essentially constructed. In the case of the novel, it may appear as if the reality of the majority rules. However, both ways of being co-exist—and actually depend on—each other, whether the citizens of Hebron know it or not. Just as Wynter writes, “If they demanded her involvement in their conspiracy, she needed them in hers (32).” The character of Aunt Kate in the novel may be read as the call to arms to (re)invent the human that Wynter demanded in her later works. She also makes it clear that refashioning humanity also means completely deconstructing the false nature of racial hierarchies and the prison of Blackness within which people of African descent have constantly been belittled and dehumanized. Therefore, a further explanation of Wynter's human, followed by a look into the construction of the “conspiracy” of Blackness in Latin America and how it functions in our current stage of being is necessary.

1.1 The Limits of our Current Global Ethnoclass: Sylvia Wynter on Blackness and the Impossibility of its Humanization

Sylvia Wynter, a Cuban-born Jamaican intellectual, philosopher, professor, and novelist whose work covers a wide and complex range of topics and stretches across many disciplines,

takes on the gargantuan mission of saving humanity from itself. According to Wynter, the world's conception of humanity, or the human, has been created and co-opted by our current ethnoclass, or by the dominant entities of the Western/neoliberal bourgeoisie, and has been erroneously defined to include only such members of society, thus excluding most of the world's population and relegating them to an Other/nonhuman status. In other words, the West's conceptualization of the human is really that of only one kind of Man, a "truth" which must be constantly guarded and maintained through the denigration of those who do not fit into the category of the well-to-do middle classes. Although Wynter recognizes that those of non-white races/ethnicities have transitioned into this human status through economic advancements, while those labeled as "white trash" or lower-class white communities have been thrust into the nonhuman, the overwhelming factor and dominant tool of division between the human and the nonhuman has been race, and African-descended peoples have been made to occupy the very lowest rung of the nonhuman. Wynter elaborates:

While the "Indians" were portrayed as the very acme of the savage, irrational Other, the "Negroes" were assimilated to the former's category, represented as its most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational humans and irrational animals....It is this population group who would come to be made, several centuries on, into an indispensable function of the enacting of our present Darwinian 'dysselected by Evolution until proven otherwise' descriptive statement of the human on the biocentric model of a natural organism. With this population group's systemic stigmatization, social inferiorization, and dynamically produced material deprivation thereby serving both to 'verify' the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human, and to legitimate the

subordination of the world and well-being of the latter to those of the former. (“Unsettling” 266-267)

As Wynter hints at in the above passage, this process of dehumanization has been centuries in the making, a project of subordination that began more or less in the sixteenth century⁵ and continues today. In fact, Wynter identifies two previous phases of Man, and a third that has yet to be realized. While Man₁ was invented during the Renaissance through what she calls a theocentric, or God-centered modality in which the primary divisions between humans were thought of in religious terms, the world was divided between Christian and non-Christian subjects, where the objective was, of course, to be among the saved rather than the damned. The universe was created for God’s glory, and not Man’s. This worldview or “descriptive statement” of the human, as Wynter calls it, initiated the division between those who did know Christ (all of whom were European), and those who did not know Christ—which as exemplified in the journeys of Christopher Columbus and other explorers—were the so-called native savages found on unexplored territories and later, those on the continent of Africa. Man₁ lasted until the eighteenth century, when the emergence of Man₂ ushered in an era of the ratiocentric, or reason-based, genre of the human, in which it was determined that in the end, God did indeed create the universe not for Himself, but for Man to gain knowledge of it. As this Enlightenment era Man₂ focused on adhering himself to the rules of the State rather than the Church, and the development of the physical sciences, the non-Christian heathen took the role of the sub-rational Other that, in turn,

⁵ While in some writings, Wynter traces the beginnings of this global project of domination back to the sixteenth century, she has also placed its origins even earlier, to the mid-fifteenth century and before. In “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being,” for example, Wynter states, “Black Africans had been already classified (and for centuries before the Portuguese landing on the shores of Senegal in 1444) in a category ‘not far removed from the apes, as man made degenerate by sin.’ And while the roots of this projection had come from a biblical tradition common to all three monotheisms—that is, ‘that the sons of Ham were cursed with blackness, as well as being condemned to slavery’—in Europe, it had come to be elaborated in terms that were specific to Christianity” (302).

supported and gave credence to the superiority of the rational, human Man. From this moment on, “The West would therefore remain unable...to conceive of an Other to what it calls human—an Other, therefore, to its correlated postulates of power, truth, freedom. All other modes of being human would instead have to be seen not as the alternative modes of being human, that they are ‘out there,’ but adaptively, as the lack of the West’s ontologically absolute self-description” (282). This Man₂ would eventually transform into a biocentric being—indicating the rise of the biological sciences and the theory of evolution—known as *homo oeconomicus*. This version of the human was at the service of the State, but this time in largely economic, neoliberal terms. In other words, the Western economy is now the mechanism through which success, and therefore humanness, is measured. Wynter notes that the modern and formalized struggle against this overrepresentation of Man as if it alone constituted the human started in the sixties, which saw many sociopolitical, anticolonial, and civil rights protest movements gain force, a clear sign, in Wynter’s opinion, that the majority of the world would no longer tolerate or submit to their subhuman status. However, she also notes that this effort was co-opted and ultimately stifled by the incorporation of these issues into academia, now manifested by the plethora of Black Studies and Ethnic Studies programs that have been established over the last few decades. With this, the truth-altering aim of these movements became warped and extremely watered down, now palatable for the very sector they are meant to fight against. As academics and intellectuals, Wynter reminds us that we uphold current notions of humanity as developers and providers of knowledge, and indeed belong to this middle-class category of Man. As a result, academics/intellectuals have been given unprecedented power to change the truth-for terms⁶ of the Western world, and thus our current descriptive

⁶ Wynter uses the phrase “truth-for terms” throughout her works, especially in “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being” to describe the current lens through which our Western population interprets what is true. In the end, it may

statement of Man, or the human. In the end, Wynter's lifelong project urges us to see that we as individuals control what defines the human, it is we who inscribe our modes of being, rather than a pre-existing mode of humanness being imposed upon us. However, this agency is generally "opaque"⁷ to us as we operate from and rely on the inner workings of the current system. Nonetheless, the solution is to create a "new kind of community... that secures the 'ends' no longer of biocentric (neo)Liberal-monohumanist ethno-class Man₂, nor indeed that of the religio-secular counter-ends of the contemporary westernized imperialist and/or fundamentalist forms of the three Abrahamic monotheisms, but instead superseding them all, *inter alia*, by that of the We-the-Ecumenically-Human" ("The Ceremony Found" 194). So how are we to do this? While Wynter offers some suggestions for arriving at this "human third level" of existence, including Césaire's "science of the 'Word,'" none of them can be fully understood or carried out with the philosophies engendered by this current worldview. That is why I propose theorizing Afro-Colombian women's art in a different way, attempting to dodge the confines of conventional Western theory and logic to make way for feelings, imagined worlds, and pieces of art as whole theories in themselves. In other words, I give greater attention to the emotional impact that this artistic worldmaking process has on both the artist and the audience/viewer. Furthermore, focusing on the emotional and everyday musings about life and lived experience as primary theory is part of an attempt to resist

be interpreted as truth, but ultimately, as Wynter reveals, a certain set of so-called "facts" is usually only *truth for* a particular sector of society.

⁷ Wynter uses the term "opaque" or "opacity" to describe the unconscious and ignorant nature of most humans and nonhumans promoted by this current worldview. More specifically, she affirms that part of this erroneous, Western categorization of Man as the human entails making people think that these established orders are natural, and that no one possesses the power to change the state of things. The goal of Wynter's project is to initiate a definition of the human that includes all people, thus requiring the reality of our invented nature to become non-opaque, or clear to us.

⁸ In 1946, at a conference in Haiti, Aimé Césaire gave a talk entitled "Poetry and Knowledge," in which he argues that while contributions and findings in the natural sciences have helped advance and modernize global society, this field continues to be "half-starved," providing only a partial service to an "impoverished" humanity for its lack of knowing the word, or poetic knowledge. The sciences alone do not contain all of the answers. Wynter proposes that Césaire is invoking a third science, one that can possibly lead to the downfall of the overrepresentation of the human as Man due to it being outside of current structures of knowledge ("Human Being as Noun" 26).

the co-opting of the Afro-Colombian experience for the sole benefit of enriching academia. It is important to note that with its growing popularity, the study of Afro-Colombian social movements has become a bit of a trend in academic circles, which has led to the practice of further dehumanizing Afro-Colombians as mere subjects to be examined rather than as human beings with valid, relevant and empowering ideas to share. Obviously, this is not to say that I am rejecting high theory or academically accepted ways of thinking. Rather, my goal is to highlight Afro-Colombian women's thoughts and feelings as standalone theory and as a relevant way of thinking that should be put at the forefront of studies like this in order to better connect academic investigations with the people they study. I am guided in part by the visceral reactions that I experience while reading, listening or watching the pieces of art, or simply put, by how they make me feel. I believe that this affective method of analysis, rather than a purely intellectual or Western theoretical one, remains in line with the mission of the artists here. As many Afro-Colombian women scholars have affirmed, emotions alone can and should be seen as valid tools of resistance. It is my hope that my alternative theories, while impossible for them to be removed from traditional academia, will serve as an example of how we as intellectuals can break dehumanizing barriers with knowledge production. To successfully embark on the reinvention of knowledge, one must be well informed on the past. While Wynter's work does a fantastic job of providing this general history, I have taken it upon myself to compile a more specific timeline of the construction of race in Colombia in the following sections.

1.2 The Racial and Regional Beginnings of the Colombian Nation

Historians often describe Colombia during its early years of independence as a country of dispersed and isolated regions. For example, Colombian scholar Marco Palacios characterized the relatively new nation at the start of the 1900s as having “many distinct populated regions with little or no communication between them.” He continues, “The four great economic regions—Antoquia, the Caribbean coast, the east-central region, and the southwest, including the marginalized Pacific coast—had very different levels of internal political and cultural cohesion and of ethnic composition and homogeneity” (5). Even as Colombia’s population began to grow and a more modern nation arose, the characterization and traits of these regional divisions would continue to endure and define its inhabitants for years to come. It is worth noting that some of these characterizations were racially charged, especially in the case of regions where Black and indigenous populations were prevalent. How did these pockets of so-called “Black regions” not only form, but stay relevant until today? The foundations of Colombia’s socio-regional and racial hierarchy took form hundreds of years before the beginnings of the modern Colombian nation with the importation of kidnapped Africans to Nueva Granada⁹ around the mid-1600s.

As Colombian sociologist and scholar Juan Carlos Zuluaga notes, historians have pointed out that enslaved Africans in Colombia shared common cultural and linguistic traits, as the majority of them who arrived in what today is Cartagena were from Senegal, Guinea and Angola, consisting of a diverse mix of Yoruba, Fanti, Ibo, Congo, Ashanti and Iwu African ethnic groups (94). Having enslaved African populations from the same ethnicities in close proximity to each

⁹ Nueva Granada was a viceroyalty of the Spanish Empire during colonial times and encompassed what today are the Latin American countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama.

other is most likely what facilitated the formation of Black *cabildos*¹⁰ in the colonial territory and made the planning of escape, rebellion and the formation of *palenques*¹¹ a very commonplace practice. The enslaved also bought their own freedom through processes of manumission, and once freed, often occupied similar positions as they had before, working in (very poorly and abusive) paid positions of servitude in urban areas or in mines in the Pacific Coastal region. Others became artisans or bought their own parcels of land to cultivate rice, tobacco, and other agricultural products. During the 1810s the enslaved and freed were recruited to fight in the wars of independence. Slave uprisings continued across Colombia as people of African descent made their historical mark on this time in history, with such figures as the mulatto admiral José Padilla being widely recognized for his heroic efforts (94-95). Still, many other efforts went unrecognized, and although Colombia emerged as an independent and modern nation, freedom was still no guarantee. 1820 saw the ratification of the first abolition law. However, proponents of slavery put many obstacles in the way of freedom, such as the *libertad de vientres* law, which permitted slave owners to keep the children of the enslaved as such until they turned 18, and other provisions that did not permit freedom for enslaved workers on rural plantations and mines. After the definitive abolition of slavery in 1851, Afro-Colombians continued to be subjugated as they greatly contributed to the mining and agricultural sectors of the nation. The latifundio system, a mechanism of control

¹⁰ *Cabildos negros* were essentially groups of enslaved Africans that were authorized by the colonial authorities to congregate. According to scholar Nina S. de Friedemann, in Cartagena de Indias, *cabildos negros* had their origins in small infirmaries, known as *casas de cabildo*, where sick enslaved people were treated for their illnesses, sometimes being brought straight from the slave ship (87). These *cabildos* also had the intended social and political function of controlling groups of enslaved Africans and keeping insurrection at bay. On the contrary, they ended up becoming spaces in which the enslaved were able to communicate, preserve, and create cultural practices. For more information on *cabildos negros* see Friedemann's article "Cabildos negros: refugios de Africanía en Colombia" (See bibliography for full citation).

¹¹ A *palenque* is a term used to describe communities formed by enslaved people who ran away from their owners. Perhaps the most well-known *palenque* in Colombia was San Basilio, near Cartagena. Another notable *palenque* was known as El Castigo, located in the southwestern region of Colombia en Patía (95).

inherited from colonial times in which one person owned and controlled large sectors of land which laborers worked on, continually threatened the actions, pay and independence of these communities (96-97). Overall, the role of the enslaved, runaways and eventually free Colombians of African descent and their settlement and migration throughout the region from slavery until the nineteenth century suggests that they played a much more substantial role in the history of the nation than has been generally admitted or suggested. Furthermore, this proves just how minimized and invisibilized Afro-Colombians had to become in order to fit within the discourses of *mestizaje* in which they—according to official history—played a minuscule part.

Even with the early nation building discourse that was *mestizaje*, it was clear from the beginning that this inclusive discourse of racial mixture was more of a foundational myth than anything, and on the contrary, served to impose social and economic measures of racial exclusion and practices to whiten the population. Colombianist Peter Wade gives an insightful example of the racist undertones so evident in this concept of perceived racial harmony when he cites passages from the writings of Colombian politician and lawyer José María Samper, written in 1861:

‘this marvelous work of the mixture of races . . . should produce a wholly democratic society, a race of republicans, representatives simultaneously of Europe, Africa and Colombia, and which gives the New World its particular character.’ This did not stop him from characterizing indigenous people as ‘semi-savage,’ ‘of primitive race,’ and ‘patient but stupid,’ nor from demeaning in racist terms the black boatmen (*bogas*) of the Magdalena River whom he encountered on his travels, whose ‘savage features, fruit of the crossing of two or three different races’ betrayed minds for which ‘the law [is] an incomprehensible confusion, civilization a thick fog and the future, like the past and the present are confounded in the same situation of torpor, indolence and brutality’; these

people ‘had of humanity almost only the external form and the primitive needs and forces.’ Typically of a liberal mind, Samper did not despair entirely of the black people he met, some of whom seemed to him ‘to form an energetic race, of excellent instincts and capable of becoming an estimable and progressive people with the stimulus of education, industry and good institutions,’ but the black boatmen he met earned his particular disapproval, and he thought they would ‘only be able to regenerate themselves after many years of civilizing work, fruit of the invasion of these jungles by agriculture and commerce.’ In abstract terms, mixture should produce democracy; in practice, it could produce a barely human type, like the boatmen, product of the mixture of ‘races debased by tyranny,’ with little or no European input. (8)

Like many intellectuals of his time, Samper characterized Black and indigenous peoples as being inherently degenerate, thus tainting the “marvelous...mixture of races” to which he refers. It was only with the infusion of European blood that these lower races could become productive citizens. It is also quite telling—but not surprising—how such racist arguments were constructed around very paternalistic discourses of supposed care, concern and motivation for the less civilized. While in the opinion of Samper, for indigenous peoples all hope was lost of becoming civilized, he believed that some Black people had positive traits that—with a bit of help (or whitening)—could be elevated and improved upon. Still, others like geographer Rufino Gutierrez opined that mulattoes living and working in the mining towns in the province of Antioquia “live like draft animals without souls” and displayed an extremely hostile character towards their white Colombian counterparts (4). Furthermore, different racial stereotypes emerge in the Colombian literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An oft-cited example are the idealized descriptions of the Black inhabitants of the Cauca Valley found in the classic Colombian novel

María by Jorge Isaacs, who described them as “part of a poetic natural landscape, displaying obsequiousness, rustic Christianity, and musical talent” (6). Yet another interesting instance of the social proliferation of this racial thought are stories found in women’s literary magazines. In *El Verjel Colombiano*, for instance, which was published from 1875-1876, a fictional short story recounted:

a young man's awakening interest in and attraction to a neighborhood *morena* (an Afro-Colombian) whom he found refreshingly candid, innocent, multifaceted, and talented, but ugly. He enjoyed the *morena*’s company and speculated that she might make a good wife; she was tender, sensible, docile, virtuous, sufficiently educated, well-connected socially, adept at domestic chores, and had a high moral conduct. Moreover, he reasoned that her lack of beauty might ensure a tranquil marriage, minimizing jealousies or the unwanted attention of other men. He was set to make the rational choice when he spied ‘divinity in human form...,’ a young gentle beauty with snow-white skin at the peak of her enchanting charm. In seeing her he fell desperately in love and then understood romantic love; realizing that his infatuation with the *morena* had passed, he decided not to marry her. (Stanfield 56-57)

The varied depictions I have presented in the above pages only scratch the surface of the number of degrading and highly simplified discourses that surrounded Colombians of African descent since the founding of the nation. Whether the white gaze depicted them as inherently uncivilized animals without remedy, poor, barely human savages in need of help, or physically unattractive, always just falling short of white society’s aesthetic mandates, Afro-Colombians became encased for life into this lowly status, thus justifying the state’s abandonment and mistreatment of Black communities for centuries onward. However, this confinement to a barely

human status would take on new forms of maintenance—and would even come to be constitutionalized moving into the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries as Western notions of liberal politics took over Latin America.

Colombia has had quite a long narrative of racial exclusion and discrimination that beyond constructed notions of region and race, have come to be inscribed into official law. The legislation, on the surface, may not appear racist, however, in it we see racism and discrimination take on more covert forms, in this case, under the cover of protecting Afro-Colombian communities and culture. The country has one of the biggest populations of African descent in Latin America, and the region along the Pacific Coast in particular has come to be identified with Afro-Colombian history and culture, with some regions in the area, such as Chocó, having up to an 80 to 90 percent Afro-descendent population (Dixon 38). More specifically, these lands,

extend 1,300 kilometers from southern Panama to northern Ecuador along the Pacific Coast. A global biodiversity ‘hot spot,’ the region is home to a variety of ecosystems (coral reefs, mangroves, rock and sandy beaches, coastal forests, high and lowland tropical moist forests) and myriad plant and animal species, many endemic. In the early 1990s, most of the region was yet to be overrun by drug cultivators and traffickers, guerillas or paramilitary forces. It was better known as a supplier of natural resources: timber, gold, platinum, silver, oil and natural gas (Asher 2).

Despite the fact that these communities have inhabited the same region since before the abolition of slavery¹² in many cases, their legal right to claim the land has never been recognized. However,

¹² A large percentage of Afro-Colombians in this region are said to be the descendants of slaves brought to Colombia during colonial times, forced to work the gold and silver mines of the Pacific Region. After the abolition of slavery in 1851, many former slaves stayed and continued to work the mines, thus functioning as paid or at least somewhat compensated labor, although still very much abused and subjugated. Therefore, many Afro-Colombians claim ancestral ties to the land that go back literally hundreds of years.

this supposedly changed with the implementation of Law 70. Approved in August of 1993, Law 70, The Law of Black Communities, contains eight chapters and sixty-eight articles which recognize:

that black communities occupying the *tierras baldías* (empty lands) of the rural, riverine zones of the Pacific river basins and using traditional practices of production have the right to collective land titles in accordance with the following articles. The law also proposes to establish mechanisms to protect the cultural identity and the rights of the black communities of Colombia as an ethnic group, and to promote their economic and social development to guarantee that these communities obtain real conditions of equal opportunity vis-à-vis the rest of Colombian society. (5)

However, almost thirty years after the passage of this law, its measures have failed to be upheld. In the end, the constitutional provision acts more so as a symbolic gesture at best, with no real effort by the government to protect or carry out Law 70. In fact, the government has violated their own stipulations numerous times in favor of furthering economic development plans that almost never pose any benefit to the Pacific Coastal region's own population. Although contemporary Afro-Colombian sociopolitical movements have brought the systemic violence targeted at Black communities to light, generating an unprecedented international web of support for Black communities consisting of non-governmental, governmental and grassroots organizations and leading to the consequent denouncement of the Colombian government, the origins and long history of Afro-Colombians, and more broadly, Afro-Latin Americans, remains unknown to many. This suffocated narrative—and the motives behind its silencing—consist of much more than a generalized harkening back to a legacy of colonial slavery in the Americas or the so-called progressive turn that saw various Latin American countries infuse constitutional

reform processes with multicultural and pluritethnic language in the 1980s and 1990s. There are so many happenings in between these historical events that give invaluable insights into the ways in which African descendants have been systematically placed into a position of denigration and dismissal since the fifteenth century, with the intention of keeping them there. If they could not be eliminated, at least they could be subjugated for life. The kidnapping of people from the African continent and their consequent enslavement in the Americas was only the beginning. I argue that Colombia's past, present and future constitute the perfect example of the long and sordid trajectory of Blackness in Latin America, and the effects and consequences it has, not only on Black populations, but on the shaping of a national and continental historical narrative.

1.3 Precursors and Legacies of the 1991 Constitutional Reform Process and the Political Rise of Blackness in Colombia

The formation of Blackness as a referent of race and status in Colombia started to make itself known in the very early decades of the nation's independence. Of course, although one could trace this coming-into-Blackness to the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to Colombia, for the purposes of my project, I find it more prudent to focus on the systems that replaced legal slavery in the Americas to continue to subordinate and dehumanize Black subjects. Furthermore, much of the documentation, like that which I have cited in the previous section, serves as an example of an articulation of the Black subjects defined by the State, and not by Afro-Colombians themselves. As it is well-known, power and authority reverberate through the written word, and throughout many times in history, Afro-Colombians have had no or very restricted access to such a valuable discursive weapon. However, Afro-Colombian social movements have existed long before the

1980s and 1990s, and encompass various prior decades of organization and political and social self-definition. In fact, Afro-Colombian scholar Santiago Arboleda Quiñones identifies several stages in the consolidation of Afro-Colombian communities within the country—starting with a growing migration of Black people from more rural areas to urban areas, like Cali, Barbacoas, and Puerto Tejada—in the 1930s. This initial rural-to-urban migration was followed by the founding of what Arboleda calls “una tradición oral urbana,” or an urban oral tradition, in which people started to identify themselves based on class and race (as Black Colombians), rather than tying their sense of self to a place of birth or origin, identified geographically by the names of riverbanks or coastal zones (qtd. in Zuluaga 104). This race-based identification helped mostly Black neighborhoods to unify themselves against white Colombian resistance to and discrimination against their growing communities. It was also during this period when a strong Afro-Colombian literary movement emerged.

In *Treading the Ebony Path*, Marvin A. Lewis alleges that Afro-Colombian literature has almost always had the goal of expressing an ideology of necessary and urgent social change in the face of extreme oppression. Afro-Colombian literature has generally been defined as a genre of written works, mostly by Colombian writers of African descent, that portrays the Black experience, marked by a past of suffering and processes of struggle, solidarity and revindication. Although the term “Afro-Colombian literature,” as a category was coined during the 1970s and 80s, when many scholars in U.S. academia developed an interest in Black writers in Latin America, some conclude that the emergence of Afro-Colombian letters goes back to the nineteenth century but was kept largely uncirculated and invisible due to marginalization and racism. Nonetheless, highly influenced by the growing Black sociopolitical movements of the period and its potential connections and contributions with Black power movements in the United States and beyond,

members of American academia, such as Richard Jackson, Laurence Prescott, and Lewis embarked on projects that highlighted some of the most prominent Afro-Colombian writers of recent generations, such as Manuel Zapata Olivella, Jorge Artel, Carlos Arturo Truque, Candelario Obeso, and Arnoldo Palacios, as well as the conceptualizations of Black life, oppression, and cultural pride in Colombia expressed in their prose fiction and poetry. Although these authors' most popular works date back to the 1940s, 50s and 60s, thanks in part to the continued interest in investigating Afro-Colombian literature, new relevance has been assigned to the novels and poetry that have become the subject of a plethora of articles, dissertations, literary collections and written studies. Since then, this literary tradition has dwindled, and it is also worth noting that although this group of highly prolific Afro-Colombian writers left their mark on the national literature, it was largely a male-led effort. Furthermore, until the 1970s, Afro-Colombian sociopolitical movements were also elite-led endeavors, headed by a few Black intellectuals from the Pacific region who "lograron moverse en los altos círculos de la vida pública nacional, y que hacen manifiestas reivindicaciones raciales y denuncias de discriminación."¹³ It was only during the last three decades of the twentieth century that the movement opened itself up to include the involvement of local grassroots organizations and community groups consisting of Black people from various social backgrounds. Ideologically, members of the movement started to mold their identities around more established ideas of self and community, rooted in a combination of urban lived experiences and cultural and racial knowledge and history that Arboleda calls "suficiencias íntimas." According to the scholar, the term refers to:

¹³ "managed to move within the high social circles of national public life and make manifest racial claims and complaints of discrimination."

el reservorio de construcciones mentales operativas, producto de las relaciones sociales establecidas por un grupo a través de su historia, que se concretan en elaboraciones y formas de gestión efectivas comunicadas condensadamente como orientaciones de su sociabilidad y su vida... son suficiencias en la medida en que insisten en un punto de partida positivo, vivificante para el individuo y su comunidad, y no propiamente en una actitud reactiva frente a los otros grupos. (105)¹⁴

Additionally, Afro-Colombians adopted the political strategy of framing their unique heritage in terms of cultural ethnicity rather than race during this period. One could argue that the height of the movement manifested itself in the constitutional reform process of 1991 and the process of ratifying Law 70. However, scholars have observed that this political movement has become very fragmented and disorganized over the last few decades. For example, Zuluaga explains that:

para la mayoría de la población las organizaciones de comunidades negras son entes extraños, que hablan de cosas que muchos no comprenden o que el habitante del Pacífico no considera como propios ni hacen parte de su realidad. Conforme a esta situación, el balance electoral del movimiento negro es bastante pobre, evidencia de que la consolidación de las negritudes como actor político autónomo en el terreno electoral presenta aún muchas dificultades. Al proyecto político de las comunidades negras... se le dificulta desarrollarse en las grandes ciudades, que es donde habita la mayoría de las poblaciones negras en Colombia, quizás porque los proyectos políticos más significativos

¹⁴ “The reservoir of operative mental constructions, product of the social relations established by a group throughout its history, which are specified in elaborations and effective forms of management communicated condensedly as orientations of its sociability and life... they are sufficiencies insofar as that they insist on a positive starting point which enlivens the individual and their community and are not exclusively based on a reactive attitude towards other groups.”

elaborados de forma paralela con la expedición de la Ley 70 han privilegiado un discurso que pone el acento en una identidad negra rural y del Pacífico. (107)¹⁵

Perhaps this fragmentation is due to the fact that the creation and ratification of Law 70 played a much bigger role in fulfilling a range of differing political agendas, rather than fomenting racial equality.

It is essential to note that the goal of the major constitutional reform that took place was not necessarily to create a more racially or ethnically diverse and egalitarian nation in which cultural difference could be openly celebrated. Rather, the main purpose, I would argue, was to put an end to the horrific violence that plagued the Colombian state and to help the government gain a sense of legitimacy and control over its citizens that had been severely lacking for quite some time. Latin Americanists have pointed out that the origins of disorganization and corruption found in the Colombian government and other Latin American states can be traced back to colonial times, when Spain ruled its territories with a system built on nondemocratic regimes of clientelism, exploitation, and forced assimilation in which small groups of elites possessed overwhelming political control (Van Cott 2). After Colombia's independence, the monopolization of power continued through laws that consistently sought to protect the interests of political leaders, resulting in a complete disregard for the rule of law and creating a highly opaque governing body that has remained inaccessible to most citizens. In more rural sectors of the country, government rules and regulations were practically considered nonfunctioning. During the presidencies of

¹⁵ “For the majority of the population, Black community organizations are foreign entities, who speak of things that many do not understand or that the inhabitants of the Pacific do not consider as their own or part of their reality. Due to this situation, the electoral balance of the Black movement is quite poor, evidence that the consolidation of Afro-Colombians as an autonomous political actor in the electoral field still presents many difficulties. It is difficult for the political project of Black communities ... to develop in the big cities, which is where the majority of the Black population in Colombia lives, perhaps because the most significant political projects developed in parallel with the issuance of Law 70 have privileged a discourse that emphasizes a rural and Pacific Black identity.”

Virgilio Barco Vargas and César Gaviria in the 1980s and 1990s, the uneven, highly decentralized centuries of governing yielded the formation of revolutionary guerrilla groups that vehemently opposed the government through violence, a substantial increase in drug dealing activities, and the retaliation of paramilitary groups against guerrilla groups. Although these groups had been active since the days of *La Violencia*,¹⁶ a combination of particularly violent happenings prompted then president Barco and other political leaders to propose a radical change in the political system as a means of conflict resolution. As Harvey Kline describes:

There could be no doubt that by the end of the 1980s, Colombia was once again in a crisis situation...guerilla groups existed throughout the decade, albeit with occasional cease-fires. Also, drug dealers were responsible for the death of some fifteen hundred people between August 1989 and August 1990, including the three presidential candidates who were assassinated in the 1990 presidential election. And paramilitary groups functioned in many rural parts of the country, at times assisted by drug dealers and at others armed forces. 'Clean-up squads' appeared in Cali, Bogotá, and other major cities, ridding them of 'throw-away people' (*desechables*), who commonly included the homeless, drug addicts and homosexuals. Common crime was rampant, with the government itself stating that 80 percent of the crimes were not reported and of those reported, 90 percent did not lead to indictment and conviction. During the 1980s, murder became the most common cause of death in the country. (155)

¹⁶ *La Violencia* refers to a period spanning over ten years in which a war between conservative and liberal factions caused more than 300,000 deaths. The assassination of populist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 is known as the event that marked the start of this tumultuous period (Ortiz 159).

The call for reform from president Barco came in 1988 when he proposed the formation of a plebiscite to vote on a measure that would allow the constitution to be changed by a constituent assembly. However, the council of state deemed this new and participatory measure as unconstitutional, since at the time, the law stipulated that constitutional change could only take place if Congress passed changes in two consecutive sessions. As a consequence, later that year Barco and liberal politicians Hernando Durán Dussán and Luis Carlos Galán organized a plan of reform that would be carried out solely within Congress, and would consider several measures related to matters like the creation of a national electoral district for demobilized guerillas and the divisions of departments into provinces (156). However, due to a general mistrust in Congress that stemmed from suspicions that members of the government were connected to corrupt individuals or entities, such as guerillas or paramilitaries, and would vote or make changes based on personal interest or pressure from external actors, some politicians continued to call for a constituent assembly. Despite this, the reform process proceeded within Congress only to have the measures proposed fail after two years of negotiation. Then, in 1990 the idea of a plebiscite was rekindled when a student movement called We Can Still Save Colombia pushed for the right to vote on constitutional change. A ballot was eventually approved and the public voted to reform the constitution through the creation of a constituent assembly (158). President-elect Gaviria proposed 10 measures to be discussed and voted upon, with topics on the agenda being congressional reform, the protection of human rights, and greater participation in the governmental decision-making process by citizens, among other topics. However, the Supreme Court later ruled that limiting constitutional reform to Gaviria's 10 points was unconstitutional and that a wider dialogue within the constituent assembly should be allowed to develop without constraint. In the end, the assembly consisted of 70 members with 2 additional members representing indigenous groups and

demobilized guerilla groups. The assembly was eventually divided into five commissions¹⁷ that oversaw different matters and finally, the new constitution was promulgated on July 4, 1991. Although the constitutional reform process was deemed a triumph for Colombia and a hopeful display of national unity with “persons who had been kidnapped sitting beside those who kidnapped them,” as one newspaper described the scene, it soon became evident that the new constitution was not the democratizing tool that everyone had hoped for. This was mostly due to the fact that many of the new measures stipulated failed to be upheld by those in office (qtd. in Kline 162). Once again, the constitution was reduced to a piece of paper and a false symbol of change. Nonetheless, the very process of defining a truer democracy in Colombia, even if it largely failed to be put into practice, did open the door for a conversation on ethnic diversity, a new cornerstone of democratic legitimacy in what has been deemed the fourth wave of constitutionalism. The term, used by Jane-Erik Lane to refer to the intense constitution making and reform processes that took place in regions such as Africa, Latin America and Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, is characterized by a heightened sense of political accountability from citizens. These new constitutions were heavily influenced by “international trends in political theory that emphasize the ‘politics of difference’ or the ‘politics of cultural recognition’ and challenge the basic assumptions of the ‘modern’ constitutionalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas modern constitutionalism sought strength and unity in uniformity, the new wave seeks strength and unity in diversity” (Van Cott 13). Therefore, Afro-Colombians

¹⁷ The matters handled by each of the five commissions were “1) Fundamental principles, rights, duties, guarantees, and liberties, mechanisms and institutions of protection, democratic participation, electoral system, political parties, opposition rights, constitutional reform mechanisms; 2) Territorial ordering of the state, and local and regional autonomy; 3) Reforms of the executive, the Congress, law enforcement and military, state of siege, international relations; 4) Reforms of the justice system; 5) Economic, social and ecological affairs, finance, fiscal control” (160).

and other marginalized groups sought this change in discourse as an opportunity to make their political presence known, realizing that their status—or lack thereof—as legitimate citizens with equal rights would now determine in large part the credibility of the government on an international stage.

Many historians cite the efforts of indigenous communities to have their rights recognized in the constitution as a model for other marginalized groups—such as Afro-Colombian communities—to follow. Sociology scholars Doug M. Adam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald have defined the discursive methods of their struggle as “framing,” or “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (qtd. in Van Cott 2). Van Cott describes how this fashioning involved constantly staging and performing “Indianness” for indigenous communities, as they successfully played up key traits¹⁸ of what they considered to be defining aspects of their culture. More importantly, they were differences that would be easily interpreted as a legitimation or justification for granting them greater legal autonomy in the eyes of government officials. In short, the complexity of indigenous cultures was essentially “simplified and folklorized” as a way of making it more palatable to outsiders, and to make it fit within the discourse of diversity now being propagated by the nation. Van Cott also affirms that the strength of the ethnic indigenous discourse and its successful penetration of government policy was due to “the historical tie to territory of indigenous identity in Latin America and the enormous historical legitimacy of indigenous people’s claims, which are backed up by documentation, archeological

¹⁸ These traits included “non-materialist and spiritual relation to the land, consensual decision making and communitarianism,’ and aversion to disproportionate accumulation within communities” (Van Cott 25). As will be discussed in further detail, many of these indigenous traits were also appropriated by Afro-Colombian activists in attempting to gain rights to their lands and establish overall greater legal autonomy.

artifacts, and living and cultural systems” (32). This strong legacy also made it easier for indigenous organizations to advance their cause without depending on allies or the support of other marginalized groups. Afro-Colombian communities followed suit to advocate for what eventually became Law 70. However, Afro-Colombians could not easily make the same historical claims as indigenous communities since their history and contributions to the forging of the nation had been virtually erased from the Colombian cultural/racial discourse. This prompted a process that anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo calls the relocation or ethnicization of Blackness.

Essentially, Afro-Colombian activists ended up re-appropriating traditions affiliated with their racial category in order to configure them as cultural activities that reaffirmed identity and implied unique alternative practices, following the lead of indigenous ethnic groups. Obviously, this “relocation of blackness” also required the institutionalization of Black ethnicity into non-governmental organizations that reflected this desire for political mobility and the will to be recognized as Black political subjects. This strategy also helped to battle other stereotypes related to Afro-Colombians—specifically in the Pacific coastal region—such as the notion that they were always unprofessional and unorganized, something that “has been considered the reason for the situation of abandonment, marginality, ‘backwardness’ and poverty of the peoples of the region” (“Ethnicization of blackness” 706). This process involved the creation of workshops, assemblies, departmental and national commissions, and ethnic organizations, which served as a means of communication between Black communities and state officials. In these professional environments, so-called Afro-Colombian traditions, such as singing folk songs or reciting poetry before an assembly made an appearance “for the sake of performance, and served to marginalize local practice as a reification of ‘tradition’” (705).

For example, one program that aided this ethnic shift for Afro-Colombians, and for the State, was a national diversity project known as the *Expedición Humana* (EH), later known as the *Gran Expedición Humana* (GEH), or the Great Human Expedition. Started in 1988, the project had the aim of compiling genetic, populational and medical information on indigenous and Black communities in Colombia in order to “protect isolated communities, provide for their medical needs, highlight their existence in a multicultural nation, and defend their right to difference. The idea was that this difference could persist alongside greater integration into the nation, in a spirit of multiculturalist tolerance” (Wade 104). However, as Wade points out, in doing so, “the EH also reinscribed a national hierarchy in which black and indigenous people were linked to isolated and underdeveloped areas, while mestizos belonged to urban modernity. Moreover, the EH now described these communities in genetic terms, as reservoirs of useful and interesting genetic difference” (104). Wade also notes that unsurprisingly, “Absent were the black people who lived in the cities of the Andean interior and the Caribbean coast: by 2005, 73 percent of Afro-Colombians lived in urban areas, and 30 percent of these resided in Cartagena, Cali, Barranquilla, Medellín, and Bogotá. Overall, the notion of diversity was almost exclusively linked to regions traditionally associated with ethnic and racial otherness” (101-102). These were the confines of “diversity” into which Afro-Colombians were forced to negotiate their survival.

Returning to Restrepo, it is precisely because of the limited definition of Blackness and diversity in Colombia that observations on the problem of this ethnicization process are so important. First, Restrepo brings attention to the need to expand the implication that the term “Black communities” connotes to combat the narrow focus on the Pacific region exclusively. He instead suggests the term *las Colombias negras* or the Black Colombias, a terminology which denotes:

(1) las especificadas en las prácticas, relaciones, representaciones y discursos en las sociedades negras, del negro y de lo negro que (2) en una relación de articulación, diferenciación, jerarquía y conflicto con otras sociedades, con otros sujetos sociales y con otros imaginarios, (3) se han configurado como tales y han construido históricamente lo que significa Colombia como país, territorio, sociedad y nación. (*Políticas de la teoría* 20)¹⁹

This notion of *las Colombias negras* rather than *las comunidades negras*, which almost always refers to the Afro-descendant populations in the Pacific region, functions as a way to expand the social and political discursivity around Blackness in Colombia, while including it not just as an independent discourse, but also as part of the nation. Secondly, Restrepo's concept also hints at the need to internationalize the spatial conceptualizations of Colombian Blackness. Part of the aim of my project is to theorize alternative notions of space and territory that draw on international Black diaspora and resistance movements, and how narratives based in the Colombian Pacific connect with other Black narratives of resistance, especially those of women, both within and outside of Colombia. I do contend, however, that in order for these connections, or even for a diversifying notion such as Restrepo's to be fruitful and effective, they must be theorized outside of the current "genre-specific particularities"²⁰ that currently divide us (Wynter, "The Ceremony" 193).

¹⁹ "(1) those specified in the practices, relationships, representations, and discourses in Black societies, of Black people and of the Blackness that (2) in a relationship of articulation, differentiation, hierarchy, and conflict with other societies, with other social subjects, and with other imaginaries, (3) have been configured as such and have historically constructed what Colombia means as a country, territory, society and nation."

²⁰ "Genre-specific" is a term often used by Wynter throughout her articles and connotes the attitudes of a specific worldview of being human. As the scholar herself explains, "The term genre derives from the same root etymology as gender, meaning kind. I use genre here to denote the fictively constructed and performatively enacted different kinds of being human" (196). Therefore, Wynter further emphasizes that our being human is specific to a certain *kind* of being, and neither naturally ordered, nor the only form of being human that exists.

1.4 A Word on the Chapters

This dissertation spans seven chapters. While the first three chapters are dedicated to providing social, historical, and racial context on Colombia and briefing the reader on the development and function of Afro-Colombian artistry and activism up until the 21st century, chapters 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to the development of my own theories on the ontologically transformational potential that Afro-Colombian women's art contains, and its ability to conceive of a new kind of human.

While this introduction gives a brief historical overview on the racial construction of Afro-Colombianness since colonial times, introduces the reader to Wynter's theory on the human, and delves into the politics of being Afro-Colombian as defined by the State, chapter 2, (Re)Voicing, (Re)Viewing, and (Re)Inscribing as Theory: Unravelling Epistemologies of Afro-Colombian Women's Artivism, gives a detailed explanation of the history and foundations of Afro-Colombian artivism, with a focus on the 1990s onward. I also utilize A. Naomi Paik's theory of rightlessness to explain how true citizenship, rights and political recognition of oppressed people will never come from the State. Furthermore, I build on Paik's theory to introduce my own concept of prosthetic oppression to explain how state-imposed oppression, while having devastating and even fatal effects on its victims, is nothing more than a false construct that can be broken only if the so-called oppressed dare to break currently supported constructions of the human, which I argue can be done through the power of Black Colombian women's art. Finally, I explain my interpretation of this new world-making process as a (re)voicing, (re)viewing, and (re)inscribing of Afro-Colombianness, and really, of the world as we know it.

In chapter 3, (Re)Defining the Future: Black (Performance) Art and a Wynterian Conception of Time, I define what past, present and future can mean in the context of artivism.

After providing a more detailed glimpse into meanings of activism and performance, I argue that through her scholarship, Wynter provides us with her very own notion of time based on the performance of race, or what I like to call race-as-time. I also review and discuss current theories on alternative time as it relates to the diaspora and race, using Michelle M. Wright's theory on epiphenomenal time and Alexander Weheliye's concept of the NOW as inspiration for my own theory on time-spaces, or what I call intra-time, conspiratorial time, and story-time. Finally, I look into how Afro-Colombian women academics are currently enacting this new sense of time and intellectuality within their own scholarship, thus demonstrating how daring to expose different knowledges has created a scholarly activism that subsequently forges a new view of humanity.

Chapter 4, entitled (Re)Voicing the Future: Cynthia Montaña and Gloria "Goyo" Martínez, examines the concept of reinventing the human through music by looking at the works of two of Afro-Colombia's most prolific artists to discover how they both inject a sense of Black humanness into the devaluating capitalist empire that is the music industry. Specifically, I discuss two of Martínez's songs, "Pescao envenao" and "El mismo," and Montaña's lyrics and music videos for her tracks "Invasión costeña," and "Las mil y ningún mujeres." While I argue that Montaña lives her activism aloud with a clear and boisterous sense of denouncement and pride, Martínez's artistry answers the question of how one can make change subtly, from the inside, with hidden messages that infiltrate the very algorithm that seeks to perpetuate prosthetic oppression and the continual whitewashing of Black sound from Black subjects. Through their lyrics, rhythm, and music videos, both artists give valuable insight on strategies that move us closer to the human through the medium of music.

Chapter 5, "*Y esto quedó pa' la historia*": (Re)viewing the Space of Afro-Colombian Lives in Cinema" utilizes director Jhonny Hendrix's award-winning film *Chocó* (2012) and a short

documentary, *Voces de Resistencia* (2017), directed by Jose Varón, to illustrate how artists and Black women participate in a (re)visualization of the human. While Hendrix's movie is a plea for audiences to simply *see* Chocó, Varón's documentary unearths a visual process of (re)placing Afro-Colombian women from the Pacific region inside of the territories from which they became displaced to reclaim these spaces as human beings. Through these examples, I also illustrate how (re)visualizing is a three-step process that entails seeing, feeling, and embodying, and moreover, I discuss how film acts as a time capsule, securely holding the future messages that we cannot understand in our current worldview.

Chapter 6, (Re)inscribing Geographies and Challenging Time with Love in Afro-Colombian Women's Writings looks at two cutting-edge Black women writers: Hazel Robinson Abrahams and Úrsula Mena, and how they (re)inscribe Afro-Colombian history through the lens of conspiratorial time, intra-time, and story-time. While Robinson's *No Give Up, Maan! ¡No te rindas!* infuses Afro-Colombian writing and artistry with a diverse Raizal perspective on the nation's Black history by telling the story of her Archipelago of San Andres and Providencia, Mena's study on Black Chocóan writers is a wonderful lesson on the endless possibilities of humanness that can arise when one lets the art simply be to speak for itself. Furthermore, Robinson and Mena both use love as a theoretical tool to demonstrate how visions of the human can be constructed through this raw emotion, thus legitimizing love as theory, a process of world-making and understanding, and a dissolving agent for the walls that Man has put up.

Finally, Chapter 7, "Conclusions: Healing(?) Through the Unknown," ends this dissertation by discussing the possibilities of healing with no clear remedies or answers to the problems raised in this project. I also highlight a few important points that can hopefully be

expanded in a not-so-distant future by Black women's artistry and the dream of bringing humanness to all.

2.0 (Re)Voicing, (Re)Viewing, and (Re)Inscribing as Theory: Unravelling Epistemologies of Afro-Colombian Women's Activism

What is it about Blackness that plays havoc on good stories?

Patricia D. Fox²¹

The colonizer/colonized spectacle is always double-coded. Something else is always happening beneath the seemingly transparent routines imposed by the new masters. The multicode cultural practices have, if anything, become even more dynamic with the passing of the centuries. The native and African populations of the Americas have always found ways of transmitting their performative practices under the very nose of the ruling groups, as did the conversos, Jews, and other minoritarian groups. This skill, long a survival strategy, has also at times been converted into an art form.

Diana Taylor²²

On October 17, 2021, a newly released music video for the song *Perra* (Bitch) from Colombian reggaeton artist J. Balvin was pulled from YouTube after an outpouring of criticism and outrage from viewers who deemed the video and lyrics to be misogynistic and racist. Balvin later posted a series of Instagram videos apologizing to anyone he may have offended, directing his *mea culpa* specifically to women and Afro-Colombian communities. He further stated: “That’s not who I am. I have always expressed tolerance, love and inclusivity” (Wong). The music video in question depicts Afro-Hispanic women and men donning canine prosthetics (dog ears and snouts), with one of the more outraging images being a scene in which Balvin is “walking” two *perras*, who happen to be two women of African descent on leashes, crawling on all fours. At one point, Black women are seen dancing and posing in cages. The song itself, filled with sexually

²¹ 1.

²² *The Archive and the Repertoire* (228).

suggestive lyrics, was written by Dominican musical artist Tokischa. Similarly, she expressed that the music video was not meant to offend, and on the contrary is “una idea del fuego femenino, de esa llama que tiene la mujer y es algo real. Es solo una comparación. Una mujer “Perra” es una mujer libre, empoderada, una mujer a la que no le importa. Me sentí muy a gusto. Es algo creativo. Además el perro es el mejor amigo del hombre” (infoebae.com).²³



Figure 1. Tokischa and J. Balvin filming the music video for *Perra* ²⁴

The fact that Balvin and Tokischa—who herself comes from a country where the majority of the population is of African descent—did not grasp highly problematic elements of their artistic creation is a prime example of the opaque eyes through which society is programmed to see—or not see—our current state of invented being. Balvin’s assertion that he only ever had respect and love for all people while agreeing to participate in a video which strongly associated people of African descent with animality, chains, and hypersexuality suggests that perhaps this love and respect only reached those considered to be mutually human. Furthermore, the fact that Tokischa defends the video as coincidental make-believe, thus reaffirming and perpetuating nonhuman

²³ “an idea of feminine fire, of that flame that women have and it is something real. It's just a comparison. A ‘Bitch’ is a free, empowered woman, a woman who doesn't care. I felt very comfortable. It is something creative. Besides, dogs are man's best friend.”

²⁴ This image is from: <https://elprofeshow.com/2021/08/j-balvin-lanza-perra-la-polemica/>.

constructions and ideations of Blackness, demonstrates an extreme cognitive dissonance when it comes to the artist herself and her roots. In another attempt to defend the video, the Dominican artist says in an interview, “Yo solo soy honesta y expreso situaciones que existen” (infobae.com).²⁵ I argue that Tokischa’s statement brings up a very valid point. She *is* telling a version of the truth, or as Wynter would say, “it is true, only because of the larger truth of which all such performatively enacted roles are mutually reinforcing functions. The truth, that is, of our being human as praxis (“Human Being as Noun” 9). In other words, Tokischa is right that her video blatantly and unapologetically expresses the invented truth through which we have constructed what has come to be defined as human—and as a consequence—nonhuman. As Wynter also affirms, it is through the medium of culture and art that these truths are projected and upheld in society, and therefore, conversely, this entertainment—in the form of literature, music, movies and documentaries—can also be used as a tool to break these constructions. The three examples of art I have just presented in previous pages—a fictional novel, a documentary, and a music video—reveal that artistic invention has a way of proposing states of being and knowledge that we have yet to grasp as a currently broken human race while exposing the failures inherent in attempting to reach a status of humanness. In our current society, an attempted transition from nonhuman to human will always result in failure due to the roles that present states of being have forced certain populations to fulfill. Since the beginnings of Western imperial expansion these roles have been constantly in the making, and Colombian history is rich with examples of methods and tools to construct and maintain racially hierarchical status quos. In the case studies above, art imitates life, and in the case of Colombia, a raging 21st century sociopolitical movement in which Afro-Colombian populations fight for their lives serves as plenty of inspiration, while also

²⁵ “I am just honest and I express situations that exist.”

providing a springboard from which hopefully, one day, life will imitate art. Certainly, this movement prompts us to redefine what we thought we knew about history, protest, and the power of (re)engaging flawed notions of humanness, which brings me to a definition.

According to *Dictionary.com*, “re-” is defined as “a prefix, occurring originally in loanwords from Latin, used with the meaning ‘again’ or ‘again and again’ to indicate repetition, or with the meaning ‘back’ or ‘backward’ to indicate withdrawal or backward motion.” So, what is the importance of the action of doing-over-again or going-backward to Afro-Colombian women’s art, and how do these actions come together to create 1) an activism that in turn 2) implies a framework for understanding the struggles of Afro-Colombian women? These are the main questions that I address in this chapter as I propose new ways of theorizing the Black woman artist’s role in contemporary Afro-Colombian social movements. Before going into details of the theory, I must ask and answer yet another question: why the need for an Afro-Colombian women’s activist epistemology in the first place? I also delve into further details on what activism means in this specific context.

2.1 Afro-Colombian Protest and Activism: Turning Rightlessness into Artistic Power

One could infer that Colombia’s reason for staging multicultural equality and passing empty, intentionally violated laws on behalf of Afro-Colombian communities is part of its agenda to enclose Afro-descendants in a state of what A. Naomi Paik calls rightlessness, a concept she applies to her study on the internment of Japanese-American and Japanese Latin Americans in the U.S. during World War II and their subsequent fight for redress, HIV positive Haitians held at

Guantánamo, and prisoners of the War on Terror. According to Paik, rightless subjects are defined in three ways: the deprivation of their rights, the violence that is required for their removal, and their labeling as a group “not mattering, not being worth listening to” (qtd. in Paik 3). Furthermore, Paik affirms that rightlessness itself is not a legal status, but rather constitutes part of a process that “emerges when efforts to protect the rights of some depend on disregarding the rights of others” (4). Thus, one can imagine how rightlessness, although not a legally cemented status, is constructed by a combination of state law, political interests, and social structures that perpetually disfavor a particular group. Most importantly, Paik highlights the inevitable paradox of clamoring to state institutions to gain rights, which will never lead to true justice. Talking about the possibility of redress for rightless subjects, she states, “Indeed, redress from the perpetrator state is impossible. Rightlessness is the necessary condition for rights to have meaning in the first place, and the U.S. state displays its legitimacy and power against rightless subjects. The state can therefore never redress rightlessness. The most the rightless can hope for in beseeching to the perpetrator state is limited recognition” (55). Although the scholar places her argument for the rightless within the context of U.S. imperialism, it is evident that rightlessness has many applications, especially in other self-proclaimed neoliberal and democratic countries such as Colombia. While Afro-Colombian communities have received a limited recognition from the State with Law 70 by successfully infiltrating discourses of ethnic identity, its creation and passage were simply an appeasement to control burgeoning protest and unrest. Just as Paik talks about the performance of redress for victims of internment camps, the legal processes that finally brought Law 70 into being were done to create an impression of compassion, change, and diversity, when in fact, this very law continued to uphold racial and social hierarchies, while also selfishly fomenting the multicultural, pluriethnic image that Colombia wished to promote. In the end, this

“racism re-formed” cannot be remedied through the State because all social, political and economic structures that constitute the State itself create the conditions for rightlessness to continue (23).

Paik’s theory of rightlessness perfectly sums up the reasons why, in part, I argue that conventional means of protest²⁶ and repeated appeals to the State using legal byways will never resolve the Afro-Colombian subjugation that has led to an overwhelming amount of abuse, killings, and deaths. That is not to say, however, that Black activist groups involved in the drafting of Law 70 did not accomplish anything. On the contrary, the way in which Afro-Colombians took advantage of the legal ratification of Colombia’s new multiethnic campaign shows just how tactful and resilient they are. As described in chapter one, by skillfully playing into stereotypes, and using indigenous communities as a model, Afro-Colombians successfully called some much-needed attention to their suffering and lack of personhood, a denouncement that, at least if it were not to provoke real change, would set in motion a wave of international empathy and kickstart an arts-based activism. Afro-Colombians, already known for their rich cultural production of uniquely traditional Black song and dance, also made waves in international activist communities, the media, and academia for applying their so-called “natural” knack for the arts to the ongoing protest movement.

As Christopher Dennis notes in his study on Afro-Colombian hip-hop, capitalist trends and globalization have fueled a consumerist culture which has made it easier to spread content through

²⁶ Here, I define traditional forms of protest as those methods that are more readily used and widely accepted as legitimate activism, such as the founding of nonprofit organizations, strikes and boycotts, picketing, marches and sit-ins. I refer to the production of Afro-Colombian women’s artistic production as alternative in the sense that it deviates from these normal or expected methods. As opposed to a highly visible symbol of resistance, the artwork I mention delves into the quieter, everyday personal roads of protest and activism that often get overshadowed or dismissed in favor of other well-established methods.

different types of media: “Globalization promotes the creation, segmentation, and assimilation of new consumer markets through the colonization of culture and everyday life. Cultural globalization involves the transnational movement of information, artifacts, cultural practices, iconography, and even the people who carry them” (42). Although the terms “capitalism” and “globalization” have historically only been associated with the detriment of these communities, talented young men and women are finding ways to resist using the same economic structure that has never favored them. Dennis alleges that the genre of music known as Afro-Colombian hip-hop first originated in the 1980s when foreign merchandise, including albums from U.S. artists like the Fat Boys and Run DMC were smuggled into the Pacific coastal region of the country through Buenaventura. As the author also points out, in the end, there were many points of access through which U.S. hip-hop culture infiltrated and ultimately inspired Afro-Colombian youth, who were able to see the struggles that their own communities were going through expressed in the hip-hop lyrics, imagery and music videos available to them. It is also important to note that hip-hop as a genre is not just popular among Afro-Colombians, but among the white/mestizo population of Colombia as well. Although both sectors come from the same poor urban neighborhoods and touch on similar issues in their music, such as poverty, economic inequality, drug trafficking, and paramilitary violence, not all of this music is produced from a racial perspective. In fact, non-black hip-hop music has proven generally more successful, reaching a wider audience than local Black groups. Despite this, there are many Black hip-hop artists that have emerged in the last several years, including Flaco Flow & Melanina, Voodoo SoulJahs, Profetas, Midras Queen, and Carboneo (39). While some artists have been able to distribute their music on official digital platforms such as iTunes, others rely on free services such as YouTube, Facebook and websites to distribute and promote their music in a process in which the artists and groups involved are in charge of seeing

to the success of their own albums, which are usually recorded on home equipment or in small studios for a fee, without the help of a record company or label. Another problem that has negatively affected socially and politically conscious hip-hop artists trying to make an impression with their music is piracy. Many artists will often make copies and sell their own albums at concerts or distribute them in local shops, only to have people burn the CDs and make copies themselves to then sell to others or upload the music to a computer or MP3 player, which means that the artists do not receive any profit from their own music. Dennis notes that this lack of financial stability may be discouraging artists from pursuing this particular genre of music and it may convince them to move on to other professions or even turn to making music from a more popular genre. Even one of the most famous Afro-Colombian hip-hop groups, ChocQuibTown, consisting of three members originally from Quibdó, Chocó, changed their music stylings as they gained more attention. Although their earlier work emphasized the plight of their people, Afro-Colombian pride, and social change, their later albums became more mainstream, with a sizeable majority of their songs having rock and pop feels rather than the hip-hop they started with. The lyrics also went from very socially conscious and locally based to empty tunes about topics that were completely removed from their previous songs. Despite this, or maybe because of it, ChocQuibTown has gone on to enjoy tremendous international success, having been nominated for and won several prestigious accolades. This is just one of the many obstacles that these artists face as they carry the torch of resistance into new mediums. Similarly, film about Afro-Colombians has gained relevance in the last few years. Adorno notes that although the production of Black film in Colombia does not resemble anything close to the Black film movements of the United States or Brazil, for example, recent films like *El vuelo del cangrejo* (2010), *Chocó* (2012), *La playa DC* (2012), y *La Sociedad del semáforo* (2012)—whose plots focus on issues faced by

people living in Afro-Colombian communities in both urban and rural settings—ended up garnering attention and have had quite successful runs in international film festivals. A more recent title that can be added to this list is the 2015 Spike Lee produced film, *Manos sucias*. However, just like Afro-Colombian hip-hop, the impact of Afro-Colombian film often faces limited distribution or is shown to non-Black and foreign audiences who fail to grasp the underlying messages of social change put forth in the film. Likewise, of the previously mentioned movies, only one film, *Chocó*, has a Black director that is native to the region. In this sense, there also remains the question of how authentically non-Black and foreign directors can capture Black lives on screen without audiences diminishing it by only seeing pure entertainment value as they watch. While the transfer of Afro-Colombian storytelling and culture to non-native hands and the dangers of appropriation will be discussed later on, the point that I seek to make now is that art, indeed, will often have a more far-reaching and powerful impact than a local sit-in or march, for example, as music and movies constitute a digital archive that leaves a trail, marks a history, and can be revisited over and over again. However, this clearly is not enough to change the grim situation for Afro-Colombians. Or, is it? Perhaps we are misreading this art, diminishing its power, by trying to measure the impact of this activism within the very structures that seek to disappear Black communities. Why not try placing Black artistic activism into a realm all its own, and seeing it not as a form of art which grapples and screams to be heard by the mainstream, but as the center of a global underground subaltern movement that cannot help but attract and foment love, creativity and Black freedom? While I move deeper into this “underground,” I will also challenge Black

notions of togetherness and gender roles in Afro-Colombian society to unveil one of Black Colombia's most powerful, yet underappreciated weapons in this fight: women.²⁷

2.2 Afro-Colombian Women and Activism: Breaking with Prosthetic Oppression and Problematizing a Movement

The construction of Blackness in Colombia has often been based on a fake notion of homogeneity or togetherness of a “Black community” whose members maintain the same interests and fight for the same goals. This idea of Afro-Colombian unity is not a concept that has solely been assumed in non-Black circles. It has also been projected to a lesser degree in Black communities themselves. Major divisions within Afro-Colombian communities became more evident than ever during the drafting of Law 70. One of these major rifts was gender-based. In many instances, the visions of Afro-Colombian men and women clashed, with each having a different idea of what was best for their communities. Furthermore, women are often discouraged from speaking, and may even face abuse from their partners if they dare to oppose their significant others' points. In a country still dominated by machismo,²⁸ the threat of violence to Black women

²⁷ In this case, “women” are defined as people who identify with or choose to use the label “woman” to describe themselves. In other words, this label is not determined by biological confines.

²⁸ Consoli and Morales define Machismo as “a term in Spanish composed of the word macho (‘male’) and the suffix ismo (‘ism’), which denotes, in this case, a reductionism or stereotype of the male gender role. Although typically, yet inappropriately, associated exclusively with Latinos, the stereotyped characteristics implied in the term can be found in other males and in most cultures. These characteristics are associated with a traditional, sexist, patriarchal ideology expressed through gender roles that exist for the purpose of perpetuating the privileges held by one group (males) and the subjugation, oppression, and marginalization of another group (females). Therefore, ‘machismo’ must be understood in the context of the social interplay of gendered societies, where the advantages of one dialectically involve the disadvantages of the other....Traditional machismo is carried out by a machista (‘a sexist person’) through misogyny, gender violence and intimidation, subjugation of women, and womanizing” (1991). For more on this topic, see the entry on Machismo in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Abnormal and Clinical Psychology* (2017).

is very real and has acted as a mechanism to control and subordinate them, keeping their thoughts and feelings in the shadows. Due to this, among other factors, men have traditionally dominated the scene in sociopolitical movements, while women continue to work in the struggle and may fail to even be recognized for their efforts. It is no surprise then, that in recent years, women have banded together to create organizations that focus specifically on supporting Black women, providing them resources to vent, create, and encourage them to take on leadership roles.

In Kiran Asher's study on Afro-Colombian sociopolitical movements, *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands*, the author documents the ways in which women in Pacific lowland communities actively organize methods of resistance. Asher traces the rise of women's groups to the 1980s, when new discourses on economic development in the region promoted a vehicle through which Black women could articulate their needs. The author contends that by using the broader, government-sanctioned argument of promoting development in the Pacific lowlands based on plans to protect and responsibly utilize the rich natural resources there, Afro-Colombian women were able to express more pressing needs that concerned their own development, such as equality with their male counterparts. At the beginning of the 1990s, women's cooperatives, such as CoopMujeres (Savings and Loan Cooperative of Women Producers of Guapi) SerMujer (Womanhood Savings and Loan Cooperative), and Fundemujer (Foundation for the Development of Women of Buenaventura) started to take form with the help of funds provided by organizations like UNICEF and PLADEICOP (Integrated Development Plan for the Pacific Coast). Asher discusses that throughout the 1990s the membership of these cooperatives grew quickly, with each organization claiming hundreds of women, mostly of African descent (133). However, these women faced opposition from another group, known as the PCN (Process of Black Communities), one of the

most prominent Black activist networks in Colombia, recognized for helping to successfully push through Law 70. In the view of PCN members, the focus on Black women's rights was seriously jeopardizing the discourse on Black unity based on ethnicity that the organization had worked so hard to sell to government leaders. One member of Fundemujer reflects on this divide when she comments, "the PCN does not want to see the two struggles together. Their position is that the gender struggle weakens the ethnic struggle" (qtd. in Asher 137). She also discusses how the members of the PCN did not want to recognize the hard work that Black women had done in the process of trying to pass Law 70. Women from the organization were visibly proud of their roles as Black women in the struggle, however "What was less visible, they claimed, was the support provided by Black women and organizations such as Fundemujer to...pass Law 70 and the support they continued to provide to black movements." Asher observes,

I, too had noticed that it was mostly women who answered telephones, managed the books, and took care of running the offices at the PCN, Cococauca, and OBAPO. Many women in the PCN told me that it was mostly women who organized workshops, meetings and mobilizations, often on shoestring budgets. They bought supplies, cooked and served food, and cleared up after gatherings. When there was no running water at the Buenos Aires Palenque, it was women who figured out the problem. Fundemujer compañeras [colleagues] and others said that women's logistical and administrative contributions tended to remain invisible or undervalued within el proceso [the PCN]. (137)

It was clear that while the PCN and other grassroots organizations promoted economic development, their notion of progress did not include equality between the sexes. Women's cooperatives sought to change this view. As one woman activist put it: "what about development as equality for women? In our family, in our municipality, if we do not have equality for women,

then there can be no development”” (qtd. in Asher 139). Asher remarks that women’s collectives functioned by using everyday practices as a means of organization. In other words, jobs considered to be women’s work, like making handicrafts or selling food in the streets, was used to create motivating networks for women in similar working and living situations, which became a way to subvert widely held notions that only assigned a woman’s worth to her domestic and work duties. Instead of going home after work to take care of their families, Black women joined together in organizational meetings. The displacement of the women’s everyday duties as a means to create the foundation for a heightened activism seemed to deeply unsettle many male activists. Surprisingly, in order to maintain a sense of professionalism, the women’s groups rarely discussed issues such as domestic violence, discrimination, and sexism directly. Rather, these meeting spaces served as a mechanism for women to theorize on how they could productively convey the importance of women’s equality and mutual respect to men in the only place in the community where members of the opposite sex were prohibited. There were exceptions though. For example, the women of CoopMujeres decided to celebrate Father’s Day at one of their workshops. The women cooked for their husbands, not just to dote on them but also as a means of showing “how cooperative members helped sustain and recover local produce and culinary traditions.” Asher also writes that “After the meal, there were humorous skits and songs about the various kinds of relations between men and women. One contrasted a home where sexism, jealousy and abusive behavior abounded with another where the man helped with chores and childcare and supported the woman’s involvement in the cooperative” (135). Other struggles ensued as well, as Afro-Colombian women were not just fighting against patriarchal conceptions of progress, but also took measures to increase their self-confidence as Black women, which also entailed defining other notions of Blackness. For example, Teófila Betancourt of the Guapi Committee of the Black

Women's Network described to Asher during an interview how in Colombia, Black women are "discriminated against triply—as poor people, as women, and as blacks" which almost always leads to the underestimation of the beauty, capabilities and strength that Afro-Colombian women possess. For this reason, Betancourt and her Women's Network have deemed the revalidation of Afro-Colombian female identity a crucial part of helping to advance the protest movement itself. In one workshop, the organization put on a hairstyling competition in which women were encouraged to see their natural hair as beautiful, instead of being tempted to conform to Eurocentric ideals of beauty by relaxing or perming their hair. She calls these confidence-building strategies working from the "head out" (143). Finally, Asher's intimate interviews with these women's organizations have also revealed how Blackness is viewed differently across gender and organizational standpoints. Dora Alonso and Mercedes Segura, members of Fundemujer, commented on how, along with the fact that the PCN did not do enough to recognize the role of Black women's organizing, they were also opposed to the fact that the PCN did not allow non-Black people to participate in their struggle, unlike Fundemujer. Mercedes said of her mestiza friend Dora, "After much discussion, we called ourselves the Red de Mujeres Negras, but does that exclude mestiza women? No. Dora is mestiza, but also a 'black', not because she has a black husband, but because she cares; she gets involved" (qtd. in Asher 142). Here, it is interesting how Mercedes defines Blackness based not on skin color, but on solidarity with the movement and on values of racial equality as opposed to superiority. In the end, Asher successfully frames how Black women become activists by asserting their womanhood through the governmental discourse of economic development, which—in this case—resulted in the attainment of funding and resources from institutions, allowing them to hold educational workshops and plan protests. Although the emergence of Afro-Colombian women's cooperatives was met with opposition by

other Black organizations, thus proving the heterogeneous and combative nature of the movement, the women were able to hold their own and create compelling arguments in support of their communities at the political level. In *The Awakening of Afro-Colombian Communities*, a testimony by Zulia Mena reinforces this view of Afro-Colombian women as strategists, community organizers and politicians.

In the preface of *The Awakening*, editor María Inés Martínez asserts that the goal of this book project—a collection of testimonies from Black Colombian leaders—is to contribute differently to the growing scholarship not just on Black communities, but on Colombia at large. While many scholars and even the media are all too willing to perpetuate the view of the country as a site of narcoterrorism or appropriate the Black movement within the country as a springboard for academic theory and scholarship, Martínez strives to provide a truthful and intimate story of Black struggle that does not sensationalize or stereotype. One of those stories is that of Zulia Mena, an activist, ex-congresswoman, and the first Black female mayor of Quibdó, Chocó who has been responsible for helping to establish various Black activist organizations. In her testimony, Mena discusses how her upbringing in rural Campobonito shaped her present activist philosophy of building up the community starting with the wellbeing of women and families. Women are seen as the center of the household because they are the ones who must stay to manage the home and take care of the children while men are often gone for extended periods of time, travelling to earn money in agricultural work, logging or fishing. In some cases, wives and mothers take jobs in which they must also travel, usually to the nearby city of Quibdó to work as street vendors. Nevertheless, they are still fully expected to tend to their family and other domestic duties. Although a woman's role of taking care of and educating her children is vital, Mena argues that women cannot properly use their position as activists and heads of the community because of

machismo and the highly physically isolating position of a strict work-home existence. Furthermore, the activist claims that traditional notions of ideal femininity associated with passivity and submissiveness are long-held customs that have hurt Black women's abilities to denounce this undeserved second-class status. She comments, "Nuestras mamás tienden a educar a sus hijas de manera pasiva para hablar muy poco y no expresar lo que sienten. Las hijas deben aceptar todo con sumisión, porque es voluntad de Dios, mientras que a los hombres se los educan para ser más altaneros" (275).²⁹ In this way, Mena confirms the need for Afro-Colombian women to turn their daily service to their husbands and children into activism that reasserts their worth and thus strengthens the cultural and political discourse of the Afro-Colombian community. She also reappropriates the tradition of interconnected family life in the Pacific as an organizational strategy that resists the stereotype of the broken nuclear family in Black communities, a notion often used by the state to frame Afro-Colombians as inherently disorganized and the cause of their own socioeconomic problems. While women's movements encourage resistance in everyday activities, still other women take an alternative approach to break even further from their current invented modes of being.

2.2.1 Prosthetic Oppression and Black Women's Activism

Sylvia Wynter has claimed that the sustaining "truth" that has supported the Western conception of the human for so long manifests itself in the "performatively enacted roles" that each of us has been assigned and which we put into practice on a daily basis. Calling our current

²⁹ "Our moms tend to passively educate their daughters to speak very little and not express what they feel. The girls should accept everything with submissiveness because it is God's will, while the men are educated to be more haughty."

being-in-the-world a certain kind of performativity is yet another way in which Wynter indicates the man-made—rather than natural—status of the human. In other words, if our way of being is a performance, then we certainly have the choice to perform ourselves in a different way. I argue that performing humanness differently is exactly what Afro-Colombian women artists do. Artivism, or the use of art as activism, is the main tool through which the performance of Blackness is carried out and transformed. Performance Studies professor Diana Taylor, borrowing from scholar Elin Diamond, describes performance in its most basic form as “a doing, something done” (“Performance”7). Taylor characterizes activism in a very similar way, affirming that when it comes to activists, they are urged by the need to do *something*, anything, without necessarily having any expectation that unjust situations will change. This happens to be the main difference between activists and artists. While activists tend to have an explicit goal of changing or denouncing the shortcomings and violence of dominant socioeconomic and political systems, artists do not necessarily create art with the specific intention of seeing change. In fact, the art in question may have no political purpose at all, even though it may appear that way. Furthermore, I affirm that artists need not proclaim themselves an activist or artist in order for them to be considered as such, like those who run Black women’s cooperatives. Artists, then, allow their art to simply *be*, letting their creativity tread the fine line between art and activism, wherever or whoever it may inspire. As Taylor concludes “Performances, as these artists suggest, are not representations or imitations of certain actions. They are not about falsifications of something REAL. They are ACTIONS, interventions in the world. These performances have consequences, even if they do not always have the power or efficacy the artist wishes” (169). While the Afro-Colombian women artists I discuss in this project do not specifically call themselves artists, the common goal for all is to take action, or to create consequences, whatever their effects or affects might be.

One of these consequences, I argue, is the unmasking and dismantling of an invented, very “genre-specific” oppression. This is not to say that the effects of social, economic or race-based oppression are not real. Rather, I am affirming that oppression implemented by external forces, or the labelling of certain sectors of the population as oppressed, is all part of the construction of Man, and a consequence of its overrepresentation as the human. I argue that this mechanism of oppression is one of the many performances of the State to continue to protect, fortify, and aid in the proliferation of this current definition of the human. I have termed this phenomenon *prosthetic oppression*, or the attachment of performatively-enacted subordination as defined by the West’s conception of Man as human to specific populations in order to render them powerless, and thus nonhuman. A prosthesis is meant to improve the lives of its users, replacing or adding parts to the human body, altering or assimilating deformities that are deemed physical or social hinderances. Likewise, one can also think of oppression as a prosthesis that aids the inventors of Man and supporting institutions in proliferating their ideal image of the human by replacing, adding to, or even disappearing members of a given community with oppression.

Although in a practical sense, a prosthesis generally refers to a device that is attached or implanted into or onto the body to replace or enhance some part of the human anatomy, Katherine Orr, author of *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives*, points out how the term has also been applied figuratively in academic circles, expanded to include any object that has an effect or imposes on the human body. For example, the author notes that, according to the work of Michel Foucault, “any machine or technology that intervenes on human subjectivity, such as a telephone, a computer, or a sexual device, can be said to be a prosthetic.” Additionally, “As Kathy Woodard has written, “[T]echnology serves fundamentally as a prosthesis of the human body, one that ultimately displaces the material body” (2-3). In this sense, the implications and functions of

prostheses—intentionally or unintentionally—may not always be to improve quality of life. Furthermore, they may not just be used to replace, but to add on to an already complete and functioning body to alter or change one’s appearance, and thus do not require the pre-existence of injury or deformity to be used. In my theory of prosthetic oppression, I interpret the state itself as the functioning body, which, in order to enhance the image of Man as the human, applies the prosthesis of oppression to certain populations. This sociopolitical oppression mainly manifests itself in the form of racism, physical and psychological violence, poverty, and neglect, as well as a plethora of other forms that are too extensive to list here. In the case of Colombia, the State attaches these superficial forms of oppression to their populations of African descent—among other sectors of society—to allow the Man as human to thrive, while dehumanizing those that are not allowed to be in this category. This prosthesis functions as an attached entity, however, only as long as the truth-for-terms of our current worldview are allowed to stay in place, which takes me to another reason I use the word “prosthetic.” Wynter asserts that the true state of oppression we must worry about is the subordination of our minds to our current ways of thinking. Orr also highlights the interconnections between the development of actual prostheses to ways of being and thinking that further demonstrate Wynter’s point, which I will continue to elaborate on below.

First, Orr affirms that prosthesis wearers incorporate “artificial parts in the practical details of daily living” (1). While this may seem obvious with regard to prosthetics, it also becomes clear that prosthetic oppression has been constructed in such a way that it invades the miniscule details of everyday life for select individuals in the name of practicality for the State. In this case, prosthetic oppression is represented through the projection of racist attitudes onto Afro-Colombian populations as they struggle to survive. This may include anything from microaggressions to the taking of life, land or personal possessions by paramilitaries or other State-supported institutions

in order to perpetuate lack of personhood. Orr contends that this sense of lack plays an important role in the social categorization of prosthesis wearers, who are diagnosed in a medical system and social climate that “seeks out difference and prioritizes impairment.” Overall, she reminds us that “Diagnosis defines bodily difference as pathology” (8). Furthermore, this difference often connotes constant dependency on people or the health care system for assistance. The official diagnosis of difference as disability affords people access to State benefits that they would not be able to receive without this classification. Likewise, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Afro-Colombians must adhere to certain notions of ethnic Blackness, already perceived as a major lack of humanity, to receive so-called benefits and limited recognition from the State. Both of these models doom their supposed beneficiaries, as they are labelled as less-than-human by their conditions from the very beginning, something that will never cease to negatively affect quality of life, no matter how many benefits become available to these groups. Secondly, prostheses, much like oppression, have become increasingly advanced with the goal of becoming hidden or almost imperceptible, making its wearers seem as close to “normal” as possible. Similarly, oppression has also been transformed in its pursuit to lie just under the surface. Just as peg legs of the 18th century are seen as outdated and no longer used as a prosthetic to help amputees walk, colonial slavery and legal segregation are no longer useful or acceptable forms of oppression, but rather have taken on more subtle—and seemingly natural—forms, acting as a perpetuation of those historical methods of mass subjugation and difference-signaling. In short, forms of oppression change to accommodate the times. Orr contends, “As is evident, in nearly every life decision that entails thoughtful discrimination, from what we eat to how we speak, the aesthetics of representation are class-bound. Similarly, elaboration of the body has been profoundly shaped by capitalism. The economic politics of who owns one’s self and therefore who has the power to make decisions about

one's self have continuously influenced prosthetics making and wearing." Eerily similar to the timeline that Wynter outlines for Man₁ and Man₂, Orr notes that in premodern Europe one's body and one's will were interpreted as belonging to God or a sovereign ruler, however, this changed in the eighteenth century with a transition to science and the economy as the dominating factors of society. Thus, from the eighteenth century onward, humans became autonomous, individualistic subjects who had the power to bring their own will into being, which came with greater economic freedom and more importance placed on bodily aesthetics (5). Nonhumans, however, often became indebted financially to the State and were afforded little to no economic or social mobility. To conclude, the real oppression that lies behind this societal prosthesis is our unknowing subordination to our current ways of knowing the world, and our failure to truthfully answer "the question of who-we-are" ("The Ceremony" 193). Therefore, we must make way for Afro-Colombian women's epistemologies, which bring us closer to the notion of the ecumenically human.³⁰

2.3 (Re)Voicing, (Re)Viewing, and (Re)Inscibing as Theory: New Epistemologies

In one of Wynter's earliest articles, in which she begins to lay the groundwork for her grand project on the human, she proclaims that:

I accept Brecht's thesis that in settled periods of history, culture—and literature which is its part, with criticism as its partner—can reflect reality. But that in traumatic times like ours, when reality itself is so distorted as to have become impossible and abnormal, it is

³⁰ Wynter repeatedly uses the term "ecumenically human" to express a universal humanism, or one which harmoniously unifies many kinds of human, rather than representing just one.

the function of all culture, partaking of this abnormality, to be aware of its own sickness. To be aware of the unreality of the unauthenticity of the so called real, is to reinterpret this reality. To reinterpret this reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it. (“We Must Learn” 24)

It is my belief that, from the very beginning of her project, Wynter does not only beg us to wake up from the state of unconsciousness in which we are living, she also gives us clues on how we might do that. As the above passage suggests, her recommendation is that to move forward into consciousness, we must go back, undo, and redo culture as we know it. Throughout my dissertation, I argue that Afro-Colombian women indeed partake in this process of redoing by telling stories with their art that reverberate and change traditional forms of activism, and more broadly, turn a historical narrative on its head. As Wynter affirms, culture, consumed in books, movies, and music, among other mediums, must stop representing the “unauthenticity” of our world, and instead dedicate itself to reinterpreting reality. That is why I propose (re)voicing, (re)viewing, and (re)inscribing as a theory that will reinvent the human through culture. The basis of the theory is simple: it consists of telling stories. It is undeniable that power lies in words, and the capability to speak and be heard is a privilege that is afforded to few. However, Black women’s art increases that hope, and although there is no guarantee of these stories being heard, read, or watched, the intention of the activist is being fulfilled: that of creating in the first place, and doing *something*. When all odds are against her, she lets the art *be*, to hopefully one day discover, inspire and change. It is worth noting that I put the “re-” in parentheses in order to express that while many of these women may be rehashing or retelling past histories from their point of view, they may also be creating new ones, or exposing a part of history that, in fact, has never been told. In some circumstances, these narratives tell of the future, and in others, they combine past, present and

future to bring about completely timeless worldviews. This epistemology leaves room for all of these options and more. While (re)voicing identifies the voice—and more specifically—singing as the main instrument of this undoing and redoing, (re)viewing, and (re)inscribing recognize the power of the visual and the written word respectively. I chose each of these three methods of storytelling because they have proven to be the most available and versatile forms for Afro-Colombian women to express themselves artistically and politically during recent times. Furthermore, with the prevalence of social media and streaming sites, Afro-Colombian women's art has been able to reach a wide audience through digital platforms. Therefore, these performances take on new life in the virtual realm.

The act of speaking in these diverse ways is also fundamental as theory because it is often the primary way in which women's emotions can be thoroughly expressed without having to filter or hide individual truths. Furthermore, this coming-out-of-silence engenders emotional connections on the basis of shared or even opposing lived experiences. Therefore, in this Black women's epistemology, knowledge is defined as speaking truth, hurt, hopes, and dreams, rather than expressing oneself from an intellectual or academic basis that requires the acquisition of external theories. As Audre Lorde affirms, for many Black women there exist "truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth" (43). Emotions, thoughts, and feeling that have not been expressed previously, and which are spoken and expressed, represent the beginning of a new knowledge that lies outside of the realm of our current modes of being, and thus provide rich alternatives to reinvent the human. Lorde astutely asserts that Black women who recognize their emotional interests, in addition to socioeconomic or political ones, and are willing

to use them as a tool to support and strengthen other women have the power to uplift not just themselves, but entire communities.

Here, love and compassion are the key to an ontologically transforming knowledge. The recognition that solidarity among Black women of any background can invent change across sex, gender, age, and race is especially important to the idea of creating new worldviews. Although I take inspiration from Afro-Colombian and other Black feminist scholars who advocate for the integration of emotions as legitimate theoretical tools, I do not define this as a feminist theory or project necessarily, but rather as a *human* one that dissolves performatively-enacted categories of being. Scholar Aurora Vergara-Figueroa, for example, posits Black women's conspiracy, or coming together, as "an act of love and care" and suggests that Black feminist theory can indeed be a process that involves men and children as much as it involves women ("Afrodiasporic Feminist Conspiracy" 118). Vergara cites views of African feminisms, noting that "un verdadero ejercicio de liberación debe afectar la conciencia tanto de mujeres, hombres y niños, pues todos comparten una base común, una experiencia y una herencia cultural. De ahí que, a los hombres se les invite a participar como compañeros en la resolución de problemas y en el cambio social" ("feminsimo afrodiaspórico" 118).³¹ In this way, we can think of an Afro-Colombian feminist epistemology that, while originating from the minds of women, also invites men, children and non-Black people to become allies and conspirators. This epistemology of the Afro-Colombian woman activist then, constitutes an art within itself in which these women must weave in and out of the limitations of this world, and the limitless possibilities of other imagined spaces. In

³¹ "A true exercise of liberation should affect the conscience of women, as well as men and children, since all share a common base, an experience, and a cultural legacy. Therefore, men are invited to participate as colleagues in the resolution of problems and in social change."

order to do this successfully, I argue that knowledge itself is not the only thing that must be reconstituted, but rather its timeline must also be reevaluated. That is, traditional notions of time must be examined, critiqued, and made anew.

3.0 (Re)Defining the Future: Black (Performance) Art and a Wynterian Conception of Time

...because in any given moment we are in the hearts of all sorts of human diasporas.

-Michelle M. Wright³²

Humans do not simply adapt to systems. They shape them. How do we recognize elements such as choice, timing, and self-presentation except through the ways in which individuals and groups perform them?

-Diana Taylor³³

In the previous chapters, I have established that race is, as scholar Marie Cacheo writes, “much more than a fraudulent mask we have been forced to wear that prevents other people from ‘truly’ seeing who we really are” (2). Rather, the term connotes a complex system of racialized communities and invented truths and categories that keep human beings from identifying each other as equals. Furthermore, it is a system that we participate in willingly as the mirage of Western time-space blinds us to the detrimental consequences of our own actions. If as Wynter points out, race is the “negation of co-humanness,” especially for those in the Black Population Group, who occupy “the bottommost place” of the nonhuman hierarchy, then I argue that the time-space in which it is established also constitutes a negation of co-authoring (“Human Being as Noun” 27; “Unsettling” 261). In this world, there can be no other explanation as to who we are other than the one that has been penned in foundational historical narratives that have seemingly left no room for

³² 35.

³³ *The Archive and The Repertoire* 7.

other storylines. I propose that although the room is not there and the history books are full to capacity with official truths, it is possible to *make* space—and reinvent time—in the limitless realm of art that exposes the loopholes in the invented laws and divisions of our world. How does art, or in this case, activism (re)define time, and more specifically, how can the performance of another humanness redirect the future of Afro-Colombian communities? In this chapter, I attempt to find an answer to these questions as I redefine what past, present, and future can mean in the context of activism. Inspired by Wynter’s suggestion that conceiving of another humanness means going backward to change past sociocultural patterns, I theorize on how performance could be the key to reconfiguring this history.

3.1 Wynterian Notions of Time, or What is the Future, Really?

Throughout her writings, Wynter does not specifically address the need to change the way we look at time. She does, however, constantly urge us to go outside of our current systems of being and knowing. The universal human she proposes only has a chance of successfully functioning outside of this current worldview. In order for this to happen, the destruction of these systems must take place to make room for others. This is a complicated task, especially considering that everything we do is governed by an invented system, including the way that we tell time and tell stories. I propose that one of the ways that we can start to disrupt current worldviews is to first recognize how interconnected and integral each system is to one another. This affords us a different view of the supposed natural socioeconomic and biocentric categories placed upon humans and nonhumans, allowing us to dissolve the divisions that each grouping creates. For example, one

could interpret Wynter's discourse on race as a discourse on time itself. Here, I argue that Wynter relocates the very notion of race within its own coordinates of time and space. If, as Wynter suggests, race encapsulates false but seemingly natural notions of identity whose truth-for-terms have been under construction since the 15th century and have been projected into the present and presumably near future, then race acts as a time capsule that unites the past and present specters of phenotypical and social identity formation—in this case, Blackness—in which all of us are held prisoner. In other words, Wynter's proposal of the total reinvention of the human is the only way to break out of the current time-space capsule that permits hierarchy, human rights abuses, and engineered death. In this life, no ceremony will be found to break the cycle of the overrepresentation of Man, and thus she proposes the creativity of our minds, the very same tool through which current notions of race have been constructed, as the only viable mechanism of defiance and transformation.

In chapter 2, I quoted an important passage from one of Wynter's first articles attempting to tease out the human problem: "To be aware of the unreality of the unauthenticity of the so-called real, is to reinterpret this reality. To reinterpret this reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it" ("We Must Learn" 24). I reference these two sentences again because I believe they express a different angle of time. Wynter's call for a reinterpretation involves moving *against*, or in opposition to, this unreality. One might interpret this revolutionary movement against our current worldview as symbolic or metaphorical, however, I would like to think of it as the Jamaican scholar demanding a literal pushing-back-against the "unauthentic" nature of space and time, and therefore, turning back through these concepts, as if almost going through a time machine. In many ways, we already find ourselves in a socioracial time machine of sorts. Although progress in the Western world is often associated with the forward movement of

time, our cultural notions on humanity and race have remained the same for centuries, thus allowing divisions of the human and nonhuman. One could say then, that at the same time as we live in the present and are conditioned to look toward the future, we are also continuously living in and with the past. There are scholars who have theorized on alternative concepts of time and Blackness who suggest that the past, present and future are somehow all encapsulated into the now. Michelle M. Wright, for example, uses the term “epiphenomenal time” to connote a present moment which is not necessarily tied to a previous moment, but rather has its origins in various moments across time. As Wright herself affirms, “No moment one experiences depends directly on a previous moment in order to come into being. We do not come from the past but exist only in the now, and we are repeatedly mediating that now with recollections, readings of, discussions on, and experiments about the past” (16). Furthermore, Wright argues that Western linear notions of time are problematic because they suggest “fixed origins,” thus excluding people who do not necessarily share the same experience. Newtonian causality,³⁴ for example, a leading scientific theory for European intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been interpreted as suggesting that time only moves forward, and with a perfectly preserved collective memory which is passed down through the generations. It also supposes that members of this collective are not actors or agents in their own story, but rather the stagnant products of history whose role is to simply pass on these well-documented memories. Finally, Wright contests that this emphasis on collective memory also means that certain groups are usually represented through a particular type of individual in said group, leaving other members of the group invisible (26-27). She then

³⁴ In her book, Wright explains that she is not specifically referring to Newton’s theories as problematic. Rather, the way that scholars have tended to interpret his explanations of time is troubling and misleading. Supposedly, Newton saw time as an “invisible scaffolding that gave the universe shape and structure,” and therefore, was “rigid” and “unchangeable.” Consequently, Newton’s theory has been translated in the humanities and social sciences as a progress narrative that interprets time as only moving forward (15).

employs this theory on epiphenomenal time to loosen the fixed terms through which Blackness has come to be defined, which is mainly through the historical narrative of the Middle Passage, an origin narrative that not all people of African descent can claim as their own.³⁵ Essentially, for Wright, Blackness is not a “what,” but a “who” and a “where.” This emphasis on the unknown and constantly changing meaning of Blackness depends on different frames of space and time, and is essential to widening humanity, as it is not just white-middle class humans who deny co-humanness to the darker races, but as Wynter has affirmed, it is also those darker races who refuse the possibility of humanity to each other (in instances of intraracial discrimination such as colorism, or claims of not being “Black enough,” for example). Just as Black people may deny the Blackness of another person of African descent because they lack a quintessential “Black” experience or historical background, in Colombia, government-sanctioned Blackness also runs the risk of excluding those Afro-Colombians who do not share the Pacific Coast narrative or partake in its heritage. If the universal human is ever to be truly created, other temporal and spatial origins must be recognized and accepted. Similarly, in Alexander Weheliye’s book *Habeas Viscus*, the author suggests that freeing the current assemblage of Man has the potential to take place, not in some far away future time, but rather in the NOW, which ““as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of humanity in an enormous abbreviation, coincides exactly with *the* place the history of humanity occupies in the universe”” (qtd. in Weheliye 132). For Weheliye, the act of *surviving* within the flesh is the key to creating the future. This connection between the warping of time and the fight for survival is highly relevant to the project of revealing another concept of the human, and at the core of Afro-Colombian activism. It reveals that the revolutionary

³⁵ For example, this narrative leaves out the histories of those Africans who left the continent through voluntary—and not forced—migration to other parts of the world during and after slavery.

act of pushing back against our current worldview and moving through time to not just a survivable, but a livable world, is not necessarily an impossibly grand gesture. Rather, everyday survival *is* the action of moving time outside of its normal schema.

As Marie Cache asserts, this may seem like an illogical strategy, however:

In spaces of social death, empowerment is not contingent on taking power or securing small victories. Empowerment comes from deciding that the outcome of struggle doesn't matter as much as the decision to struggle. Deciding to struggle against all odds armed only with fingers crossed on both hands is both an unusual political strategy and a well-informed worldview. It is a choice premised upon what Derek Bell calls 'racial realism.' Racial realism is a form of unthinkable politics because it proposes that we begin battles we've already lost, that we acknowledge and accept that everything we do may not ever result in social change. (32)

In this sense, activism is essentially the product of survival. The creation of art itself—in the name of frustration, anger, sadness and mourning, the need to be heard, and to make change—creates a realm of time in which living seems plausible.

While my vision of alternative time-space does also focus on the creation of the future in the present moment and seeks to expand the gamut of what is conceived of as Blackness, it does not dismiss the importance of a collective memory. While Wright admits that referencing a collective memory often conjures essentialist undertones that assume that all people of African descent share the exact same experience, I allege instead that, seen from the angle of a performatively-enacted race and time, a collective experience would not be based on performing the same way or claiming the same history. Rather, the connection lies in the action of performing itself, and more specifically, recognizing oneself as performatively-enacted and realizing that all

such dividing performances can in no way be valid. In other words, rather than a collective memory or history, a collective consciousness must be forged to acknowledge the staged unauthenticity that Wynter speaks of. Therefore, I argue that the present must consist of both a constant pushing-back-against a fabricated now and a simultaneous moving-into the future of the ecumenically human. I define the future, then, not as the time after the present necessarily, but rather as a blank space or canvas on which new stories are told, which constantly fills the empty spaces in a gaping global narrative of humanity. In other words, futures are stories performed outside of the present state of overrepresented Man and traverse into the unknown of what the actual human could one day look like.

3.2 Performing Activism-as-Time and Intellectual Praxis

So, if we posit embodied performances as stories of true humanness and view the future as consisting of these stories, then an Afro-Colombian artist's performance becomes the pivotal foundation for change. As Diana Taylor affirms, there are various ways in which the term "performance" may be interpreted. While performance may simply refer to the events surrounding the field of performance studies, it:

also constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events *as* performance. Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere. To understand these as performance suggests that performance also functions as an epistemology. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing. (*The Archive* 3)

In fact, Taylor recognizes the unique knowledges that performances possess that traditional knowledge forms do not have through her distinction of the archive and the repertoire. While the archive refers to an enduring collection of documents such as texts, archeological evidence such as bones or parts of a building, or even DNA, which are tangible, collectible substances, the repertoire points to the more ephemeral forms of knowledge that are categorized as performance, like the spoken word, or a dance, or musical performance. Just as I affirm above, Taylor also contends that although the archive is thought to be resistant to change or manipulation, it consists of just that. Historical evidence is tangible yet constructed nonetheless. Things in the archive may forcibly appear or disappear, according to who is telling the story. On the other hand, the repertoire represents “nonreproducible knowledge” that is passed on through people who have experienced a particular event. Unlike archival knowledge, which is often *made* to disappear, the disappearance of memories in the repertoire is inevitably natural. They are only available for a limited time, which means that the repertoire is forever changing. However, Taylor states that, with regard to certain practices, rituals, or events, it is often the embodiment that changes and not their meaning. For example, Taylor states that a video or recording of a performance can never count as the performance itself, which has long been over. The video then, enters into the archive as a piece of recorded evidence, but the meaning of it is still part of the changeable repertoire (20). This is exactly the case of the Afro-Colombian women artists’ works which I analyze in the following chapters. Their work is constantly split between the archive and the repertoire. All of their works of art are constructed performances which have been recorded for the convenience of the consumer. While these recordings create the possibility for mass consumption and thus a wider recognition of Afro-Colombian women’s activism, this digital archiving forces us to see past the commodity and practical usefulness of the archival evidence—whether that be a photograph, a

published text, or an audio or video recording—in order to decipher what meaning lies (or used to lie, or even will lie) behind the art itself. The truth is, we may never know. An answer may never be found to the why or how of the performance, but it is precisely this unknowability and untranslatability that should be welcomed and normalized in the construction of this new worldview. It must be recognized that part of what has created the structures of Western thought is the need to find an answer to everything. All things must be easily explainable, translatable, and understandable. However, it is this process that creates the divisions and ontological “opaqueness,” as Wynter would call it, of our current ethnoclass, which the scholar identifies as the Western bourgeoisie. If a dominant culture or civilization knows something to be objectively true, this must mean that all alternative explanations of a given phenomenon are false. The West must prove the authority and power of its knowledge systems by demonstrating and solidifying the lack of knowledge in other parts of the world. Consequently, although other forms of knowledge may be recognized, it is done so in an us/them dichotomy that automatically forms a hierarchy of rational and irrational thought. In Western academia, for example, to not know is to be intellectually weak or lacking, and is often accompanied by demands to work harder, read more, or otherwise suffer the consequences. I am not arguing that acquiring more knowledge of a particular field is futile. However, the fact that this knowledge is held as universal truth, and the idea that acquiring more of it makes one smarter or intellectually superior, is the fallacy. Knowledge is not the expression of facts as per the dominant racialized narrative, but rather of perceptions. As Wynter has suggested, the perspective I have just described is not well-tolerated by ourselves, especially considering that our very livelihood, labor contributions, professional success, and sense of accomplishment is based on Western schemas of cognition. Nonetheless, reinventing the human is not necessarily synonymous with making intellectual institutions obsolete. Instead, the mode of

knowledge production must expand and change. What if instead of attempting to fix or condemn unknowability, we acknowledge and embrace this trait as being a central guideline of knowledge production itself? What if intellectual theories were not pitted against each other, but rather were allowed to function in different epistemological realms, and even adapted to coincide with each other? A simultaneous existence both within and outside of current worldviews is at the heart of this Afro-Colombian activist methodology as I will discuss in the following chapters. From my perspective, activism, as a form of time and knowledge, does not create futures, but rather *is* the future. In this sense, as a newer realm of thinking, being and knowing, activism is removed enough from conventional notions of time to theorize a new human. However it still resides inside the current now in which it operates, or rather, within conventional meanings of past, present, and future.

I perceive activism as a manifestation of time in three parts: intra-time, conspiratorial time, and story-time. Intra-time, or what is normally referred to as the past, is the time still calculated within our current worldview which combines traditional views of time-space with alternative ones. This connection exists because the past as we know it remains a historically relevant entity through which futures (or activism) can be constructed. However, this sense of the past lacks the rigidity of traditional historical narrative and thus the qualities of invention and appearing and disappearing certain histories is taken into account. In other words, the past, and therefore intra-time, is not perceived as being complete or accurate. Secondly, conspiratorial time, otherwise known as the present, is a space in which futures are constructed. It is not necessarily a time that is fully lived or manifested, but rather a stepping-stone to the future. It is where the main conspiring happens. Conspiring refers to the constant plotting and creative process involved in unsettling present representations of Man as human. In conspiratorial time, the stage is being set for a future

change, but the results will never be completely evident or reach their full potentiality in this space. Rather, this is the time in which art builds up its power to be used as a potent tool for altering current worldviews. Here, the immanent nature of art is a key factor. Although the art at this stage may have no outward impact, it is readying itself to inspire the next generations. Therefore, the art being made in this space is dedicated to creating various representations of the future, or story-time. I call this new future story-time because it is finally the place and time in which stories of humanness are actively manifested and performed. Here, the ecumenical human finally comes together. Because of the still ongoing efforts of this complicated task, story-time is still largely unknown. Despite this, activism-as-time is working to uncover what this alternative future might look like. Although we cannot be sure how this future of the human may look, we are offered some glimpses, especially within Afro-Colombian scholarship. One example of the creation of this future which combines, alters and challenges notions of Western intellectuality, academia, and art are the scholarly articles being produced by Afro-Colombian women in the field as I will discuss in the following section.

3.3 Afro-Colombian Women Scholars Perform the Human

A revealing 2018 publication by Afro-Colombian scholar Jessica Nathalie Corpas Figueroa reveals that from 2007-2017, there was a massive increase in the production of books and articles on the topic of Afro-Colombian women. More specifically, Corpas identifies and catalogues sixteen authors, eleven of them being Afro-Colombian women, who have published 33 investigations over the decade in question related to Afro-Colombian women's identity, State violence and oppression, and Black feminisms. Moreover, Corpas recognizes similar themes and

objectives in this new generation of Afro-Colombian women scholars. For example, the author notes that they recognize themselves not just as researchers investigating a subject. Rather, they situate themselves as subjects of knowledge who reveal alternative ways of being an Afro-Colombian woman outside of the commonly identified (prosthethically) oppressive structures of racism, sexism, machismo, economic impoverishment, and state violence. More importantly, they emphasize the importance of politicizing personal experiences and storytelling as a way to unsettle the appropriation of Afro-Colombian women's bodies and lived experience by white male scholars, or anyone else who seeks to forcefully pull them into some artificial and vain notion of "academicismo capitalista,"—or capitalist academicism—as fellow scholar Mara Viveros calls it. Perhaps Afro-Colombian Black feminist researcher Natalia Santiesteban Mosquera puts it best when she affirms "el hecho de que no documentemos nuestras trayectorias vitales niega la validez del conocimiento por y desde nuestra experiencia. Lo que tenemos que decir es lo que realmente enriquece los análisis que se hagan sobre nuestra situación y en ese sentido, nuestra única condición de posibilidad para asumir postura como sujetas está dada por la toma de la palabra"³⁶ (qtd. in Corpas 261). It is precisely this reclaiming of the word—and the feelings and emotions that accompany the act of recounting lived experiences in this conspiratorial time—that can lead to the remaking of the future, and therefore the Afro-Colombian woman as part and parcel of the human. These women, who come from a variety of regions in Colombia (most of which are known to have significant populations of Afro-descendants, including Bogotá), have conspired to infiltrate academia with a highly meaningful scholarship that resists co-opting and appropriation, and also continuously questions not just the answers and conclusions that big name intellectuals make about

³⁶ "The fact that we do not document our life paths denies the validity of knowledge by and from our experience. What we have to say is what truly enriches the analyses that are done about our situation, and in this sense, our only condition of possibility to take a stance as subjects is given by the taking of the word."

Afro-Colombian communities, but also interrogates themselves as Black women to dig deep with an introspective investigation that pulls from their lives, as well as that of loved ones and friends, to experiment with how pain, love, and the unknowns of the present and future can translate into action. Other scholars like Aurora Vergara-Figueroa, Castriela Esther Hernández Reyes, and Betty Ruth Lozano Lerma provide some very recent examples of the continuation of this trend in Afro-Colombian women's scholarship that focuses on the work of women in the struggle, while also highlighting the power of emotions and art in the making of these movements, thus making them scholarly activists.

In *Afrodescendant Resistance to Deracination in Colombia*, by way of poignant testimonies, Vergara-Figueroa places the emotional recovery of the victims of the Bojayá-Bellavista massacre at the center of her book and as the basis for her theory on the deracination of Afro-Colombian communities. The Bojayá-Bellavista massacre happened the morning of May 2, 2002, when members of an insurgent guerilla group known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) threw a pipe bomb into a tiny local church in the town of Quibdó in the department of Chocó, located in the Colombian Pacific region. As a result, 119 people were killed, and approximately 1,744 families were displaced from the region (Vergara-Figueroa 54). As the author notes, for many years following the massacre the government consistently denied its involvement in or responsibility to the victims, blaming the violence on the infighting between insurgent guerilla groups and paramilitaries who sought to unofficially control the rural Pacific region to carry out illicit activities such as drug and arms trafficking. However, the courts thought otherwise and held the government officially responsible for failing to protect its Afro-Colombian citizens. Much of Vergara-Figueroa's investigation specifically focuses on how this type of neglect not only serves as an example of how the government is deliberate in their mistreatment of Afro-

descendants in the country, but more importantly, how this geographically “Black” region of the nation becomes a “laboratory of death,” a geographical space in which death and destruction are purposefully fabricated in order to eliminate certain sectors of the population (xxiii). This process constitutes what Vergara-Figueroa theorizes as the D-T-D² cycle, or the Diaspora-Territorialization-Deracination/Diaspora model, which constitutes a “new cycle of diaspora” for Colombia’s Afro-descendants in which displacement and death are factored into how the process of diaspora takes place. Vergara-Figueroa’s project is unique in the sense that, unlike many non-Afro-Colombian scholars, she establishes her book first and foremost as a project of intellectual activism which seeks to pay homage to the victims of the massacre and spread awareness of Afro-Colombian struggles. She makes her strong emotional ties to the community clear when she writes in her short preface that “This is the hardest story I ever told....My commitment will end only when their anguish ends” (vii). Furthermore, in her introduction she acknowledges the importance of her return to the community to share the knowledge that she has produced with the help of the testimonies gathered. She also goes beyond representing the citizens of Quibdó purely as victims and uncovers the unique way in which this highly damaged community creates healing through song, most notably, the *alabado*, or traditional Afro-Colombian funerary song.

*Alabados*³⁷ are part of a very long tradition that goes back to colonial times. These songs were originally of a religious nature, meant to honor or sing praises to God, the Virgin Mary and the Catholic Saints. They are also used to pay homage to deceased loved ones at funerals. However, in recent times, these *alabados* have been used to express the lived experiences of the affected communities and to denounce the injustices the government has brought upon them. While men

³⁷ Throughout different points in the dissertation, I also refer to *alabados* as *alabaos*. The second term reflects the colloquial pronunciation of the word and both will be used interchangeably.

do sing *alabados*, it is a tradition mostly carried out by women. Vergara-Figueroa explains how the *alabados*, written in the margins of church hymnals, were created by a group of women who started meeting in 2006 in order to read the Bible and compose songs together. As the author recounts,

After reading the more than 250 lyrics I discovered that the song books they used were not the traditional books I had seen in other parishes. The songs I read talked about offering to God the ‘bread of a harsh history’ and the ‘wine of oppression.’ The songs asked God for autonomy and self-determination. There were other key words such as black people’s liberation, black bible [sic], marginalization, silenced history, hope, transformation, justice, liberty and managing the land of the community. (xxv)

Vergara-Figueroa interviews a young man named Mayito who talks of how, upon returning to the small town of Bellavista where the massacre took place, he helped to write songs performed in every mass to honor the victims. He shared some of the following lyrics: “The Black people can’t stand more misery and oppression. Like with the Israeli people, be with us God...The memory of our dead strengthens our history with the conviction as Black People they remain in our memory. The return to our land strengthens the hope as a united race, our song is a dance” (65). Still, other songs directly ask the armed groups to leave the area and let the community live in peace (73). This subversion of traditional *alabado* singing, a practice that Colombia has appropriated to show the apparent cultural diversity of its multiethnic peoples, has turned tradition into a weapon against deracination, and even more so, a potential path to the human. Furthermore, Vergara-Figueroa shows that, unlike traditional organizing, men and women work more peacefully in this artistic space of protest, collaborating to write, record and perform *alabados* not just as a means of protest, but as a process of healing. This collaboration across sex and gender hierarchies also reflects a

pattern of Black feminist discourse that incorporates men, rather than rejecting their participation. The works of Hernández and Lozano represent similar ideologies.

In her article, “Feminism Cannot be Single Because Women are Diverse” Lozano argues that Afro-Colombian women are constructing an alternative feminism based on the collective actions they take in their communities as Black women, as well as the legacy that they have inherited from their enslaved ancestors. This alternative Afro-Colombian femininity challenges Eurocentric and even indigenous feminisms as widely applicable to women of color. It also defies traditional patriarchal structures. Nonetheless, the author argues that the concept of patriarchy may be included in Black/Afro-Colombian women’s studies as long as “estas investigaciones no terminen constatando lo que ya todas sabemos, que estas mujeres son oprimidas por estructuras patriarcales” (22)³⁸. In other words, the concept of patriarchy may be used in the study of Black feminism, but only in a way that theorizes it outside of its normal oppressive discourse. For example, Lozano affirms that gender, meaning in this case the cultural representation of sex, must be defined in a more fluid way that does not solely take Western notions into account. She explains that gender in rural Afro-Colombian communities is based on specific roles given to women and men. While women are associated with healing techniques and medicinal practices, child-rearing and some agricultural practices, men are defined by their roles as fisherman and hunters. The author sustains that these gender roles, highly determined by nature and community building, are not necessarily directly related to any traditional African societal structures or practices inherited from slavery. Rather, they are adaptations or reconfigurations from enslaved ancestors who may or may not have ever stepped foot onto the African continent (14). Additionally, Lozano contends

³⁸ “these investigations do not end up affirming what all of us women already know, that these women are oppressed by patriarchal structures.”

that Afro-Colombian women define themselves first as a collective community along with their male counterparts before ever classifying themselves based on sex and gender as women. Lozano's investigative narrative contributes to a view on Afro-Colombians as being natural owners and cultivators of the land, which supports the notion that they have an inherent right to be there. This method of resistance is contained in what Lozano calls "insurgent knowledges," of Afro-Colombian women, which oppose hegemonic knowledge structures (20).

Similarly, Hernández points to the need for a decolonial Black feminism. Her theory encourages not just the incorporation of traditional agricultural and mining practices, but also highlights the importance of "emotions and collective affections" in forging a Black feminist resistance to extractivism, or removing natural resources from the environment for industrial sale and use. The author explains that Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins have argued for the incorporation of emotions to balance processes of intellectual knowledge, asserting that emotional and intellectual processes go hand in hand with each other (224). According to Hernández, this concept reflects the emotional attachment that Afro-Colombians have with their lands. For example, Afro-Colombian activist Francia Márquez, the nation's vice president, is quoted as saying in an interview with the author that "'For us, territory is not just a material space. It is the spiritual, the cultural, and the way of producing and relating among us as black people.'" Hernández goes on to summarize, "For black women their lands and rivers represent their parents, and they feel sad and offended when the state takes their ethnic territories away in order to benefic [sic] private interests and corporations" (228). Furthermore, the author briefly talks about the vital role that Black aesthetics play in performing resistance based on ancestral heritage. She cites the March of the Turbans, which took place in November of 2014. In this protest, 22 Afro-Colombian women marched from La Toma, located in Cauca, Colombia to Bogotá and occupied the

Colombian Ministry of the Interior for five days (Kane). When they arrived, the women were wearing turbans, an aesthetic marker that Hernández associates with solidarity, Black identity, and the subversion of Western ideals of beauty. In the end, the author asserts that love remains at the core of Afro-Colombian women's protest. I argue that the very emotions and feelings towards the injustice they experience constitute a strong weapon against the opaque consciousness of our current worldview.

Through their works of intellectual activism, Vergara-Figueroa, Lozano, and Hernández demonstrate how academic texts can serve to reinterpret and undo unreality, rather than perpetuate it. These activist-scholars do not just rely on traditional historical texts or even modern studies to build their arguments. On the contrary, they take from their own lived experiences and that of other women with whom they have collaborated with on a deep and personal level to incorporate forms of knowledge that have been excluded from mainstream academia for far too long, like those that form and exist within the realm of music, acts of ecological love and care, and everyday aesthetic representations—or performances—of Blackness. This in itself is a move toward deconstructing academia. As ethnographer Dwight Conquergood reminds us, ““Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because texts and reading are central to their life-world, and occupational security”” (qtd. in *The Archive* 27). This is not to say that academia has not embraced alternative forms of archiving and knowledge other than the one that comes from written texts, but it has often done so at a removed and cautious distance. I have found that Afro-Colombian art in academia, when interpreted, seems to need the accompaniment of some well-established textual theory to then convert it to a level of acceptable academic intellectualness. Furthermore, distinctions between the actual performance, let's say, of a song, dance, or play, and the product of its recording or transcribing, is not often taken into account. In the end, as Taylor

points out, they become two different things. However, these scholar-artivists approach the performances they observe starting with fundamental—but often overlooked—questions, such as “How did this art come to be on a personal level, rather than a macro-historical one?”; “What emotions does it stir in me/the audience?” and “Why is it important to write this down, and what happens if I (as a Black woman) archive this?” These are questions that might have unforeseen and changing answers, especially as access to these fleeting futures vary. I, for example, will only have access to recordings or performances without any direct connection or contact to the artists themselves. Although this lack of first-person connection may seem problematic to some, as I will be discussing media such as music, movies, and written text, my access to these works is similar to the way that millions of potential viewers and consumers have come into contact with them. This is crucial to note, as doing away with the overrepresentation of Man is about making connections with various genres of the human and the nonhuman in different forms, whether that be virtually, in a physical space, or through the imagination. In the following chapters, I will embark on an exercise of (re)voicing, (re)viewing, and (re)inscribing Afro-Colombian women’s art to reveal the new human in the making.

4.0 (Re)Voicing the Future: Cynthia Montañó and Gloria “Goyo” Martínez

While everyone, it seems, loves Latin music, propelling world music CDS to the top of the charts, they don't want to deal with the brown bodies producing that music. Cultural taste prefers disembodied music and staged ethnicity in the Museum of Natural History.

-Diana Taylor³⁹

Faced with old and new sounds, pure or mixed, we thrash about for adequate descriptive language: pop, folk, traditional, native, local, regional, indigenous, vernacular. No particular locution keeps pace with music's flexibility. Our naming compass shakes, rattles, rolls, spins, wobbles. Do we throw this uncertain instrument overboard? Alternately, do we recognize that living music demands warm hearts, clear minds, fluid tags, and magic compasses?

-Archie Green⁴⁰

As Sylvia Wynter tells us, culture and its proliferation in our societies essentially determines and sustains how we view the human. In our current worldview, there is no denying that music—and especially the explosion of world music genres, the Latin music boom and the globalization of reggaeton in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—plays an essential role in the humanizing and dehumanizing processes that overrepresent Man. For example, world music, as Corona and Madrid affirm, does not actually connote a genre of music including a plethora of non-Western artists and musical stylings from all around the world. Instead, it “has actually come to mean the hybrid forms in which modern forms and genres of popular music have impacted musically, technologically, and even ideologically the production of local music throughout the world...world music may represent locality, but is mostly predicated upon the marketing and appeal required to making itself palatable to first-world audiences” (17). I argue that, in these times

³⁹ *The Archive and The Repertoire* 269.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Lozano 51.

in which the superficial performance of racial and cultural diversity is highly praised, the mixture of non-Western elements of sound with its socially accepted Western counterparts is yet one more tactic to sustain the domination of Man, while others, still grasping to the status of nonhuman, are appeased by the marginal inclusion of rhythms from their culture. At the same time, global music consumers may see themselves as supporting racial and cultural diversity as they buy and listen to it. Obviously, a substantial detachment must exist between the product itself and the Others whose original sound makes it so popular. As Taylor affirms, while people do indeed love Latin music, they continue to villainize the very people and culture that produce it. Reggaeton and rap too, have largely been detached from their subversive roots of protest, resistance, suffering, and storytelling to become acceptable dancefloor anthems. Thus, the labelling of certain music as worldwide, global, or essentially non-Western is yet another mechanism of Western categorization that simultaneously works to both expose and disappear the nonhuman. This insider-outsider existence, then, is something that Afro-Colombian artists struggle with on a magnified scale; they exist as outsiders not just because of their music, but because of their Blackness, which in the Western imaginary, is a color not often associated with the Latin American sound. This dichotomy is especially relevant in the context of contemporary Afro-Colombian protest movements, as the genre known as Afro-Colombian hip-hop has been identified by scholars and activists as one of the major mechanisms through which alternative forms of protest have flourished. However, one might wonder if this music can fully lend itself to the creation of a new worldview as it becomes continually immersed in the culture of capitalist consumerism and constantly transformed to please the tastes of particular audiences. Here, I contend that—as unauthentic as the global music industry may seem—it is precisely this characteristic of opaqueness that allows for the underside of conspiratorial time to flourish. In order to reveal the true message of the reinvention of the human,

we must look beyond this worldview and past the veil of prosthetic oppression to hear the (re)voicing of temporality and humanness that is taking place. In this chapter, I demonstrate how two Afro-Colombian women singers and artists—Gloria “Goyo” Martínez and Cynthia Montaña—transcend the typical discourse of oppression and protest to reveal other genres of the human. Gloria “Goyo” Martínez is the only female vocalist of the three-person musical group ChocQuibTown. The band had their breakthrough in 2006 with their debut album *Oro*, and since then, have enjoyed international success. While the song that put them on the map, *De donde vengo yo*, represents the struggles that Afro-Colombian citizens face as a result of government neglect, their later work has become more commercialized, adapting to the ebb and flow of trends in the music industry, rather than functioning as a direct tool of protest against injustice. However, I argue that the full infiltration of ChocQuibTown into the Latin Urban music scene, their commercial success, and their seeming distance from the issues do not exclude them from being valuable allies in remaking the human. On the other hand, Montaña’s career has slowly been gaining traction since the release of her first full-length album, *Urbano litoral* in 2011. Although her music is usually described as “Música del pacífico” or Pacific coastal music, she takes from many genres, especially rap, to not just create meaningful rhythms directed at Black communities, but rather, at all of humanity. In fact, the singer-songwriter states in an interview that for her, “la música es una herramienta de transformación, por eso para mí cada canción es una oportunidad de decir un mensaje que haga reflexionar a la gente.” (“Cynthia Montaña: ‘La música’”).⁴¹ Both Martínez’s and Montaña’s lyrics strive to communicate with the living and (socially) dead in this worldview, as well as those in intra- and conspiratorial times in order to find direction for their

⁴¹ “Music is a tool of transformation, therefore, for me, each song is an opportunity to state a message that makes people think.”

future and revoice a new temporality in which an unprecedented Afro-Colombian women's oral history is created. Before I attempt to tell the story implicit in each artists' humanizing musical mission, I start with a brief discussion on the various meanings and origins of Afro-Colombian music and the oral tradition, as well as its transformation into a commercialized method of protest.

4.1 (Re)Voicing Oral Tradition: Origins and Transformations in Afro-Colombian Music

The concept of (re)voicing in this project is not just important for the restoration of histories of the human, but it is also essential to breaking down essentialist notions of Blackness in the Latin American context. While voicing or (re)voicing refers to the power of Afro-Colombian women's voices and speech—as well as their allies—to reconstruct and expand our current genre of the human and thus generate a new worldview, the term is also meant to challenge and alter the ties that bind Afro-Colombian populations to essentialist notions of oral tradition. Ever since Afro-Colombian studies have been generating popularity in academia, leading scholars on the topic have often attributed the oral traditions of Black communities of the South Pacific, which include the reciting and singing of *alabados* and storytelling, to an African legacy shared by members of this group. For example, scholars Nina de Friedmann and Alfredo Vanín have commented that:

El cuentero y el decimero, los rezanderos y las cantadoras, los curanderos y los hechiceros en el Chocó ... han llegado hasta nuestros días con las huellas del griot africano, relator de cosmovisiones, de historia y genealogías, de sabidurías sagradas y profanas ... En el Chocó, los velorios para santos, las novenas para muertos o los chigualos, florones o gualíes para angelitos, las luminarias y tantas celebraciones y conmemoraciones son ámbitos culturales

de evocación de memorias ancestrales y renovación de registros cotidianos del conocimiento. (qtd. in Arbeláez 24)⁴²

Although I do not deny that oral traditions of the Pacific Coast may have been influenced by some African heritage, as some of these practices go back centuries to the times of Spanish colonial slavery, there is really no way to measure how strong the African influence on these customs really is. In fact, some scholars such as Peter Wade have argued that Afro-Colombian oral traditions seem to have taken greater inspiration from the culture and practices of Spanish colonizers. The content of the funerary and religious praise songs known as *alabados*, for example, have their origins in Spanish Catholicism. Likewise, poetic forms like the *copla* and *décima* are also known to have arrived in Colombia and other parts of Latin America by way of colonization (24). Therefore, directly attaching any sort of oral tradition directly to “memorias ancestrales,” or ancestral memories, is problematic for two reasons. First, this notion helps to sustain the idea that there has been some sort of uninterrupted inheritance of ancestral knowledge that comes directly from Africa. This assumes that most or all Afro-Colombians are deeply aware of the legacy of African slavery that brought their ancestors to Colombia, which is not always the case.⁴³ Furthermore, the concept of some process of ancestral African cultural preservation aids in upholding the historical placement of Afro-Colombians as key to understanding the past only—as

⁴² “The storyteller and the *decimero*, the *rezanderos* and the singers, the healers and the sorcerers in Chocó ... have survived to this day with the traces of the African griot, a narrator of worldviews, of history and genealogies, of sacred and profane wisdoms. .. In Chocó, the wakes for saints, the *novenas* for the dead or the *chigualos*, *florones* or *gualíes* for little angels, the altar lights and so many celebrations and commemorations are cultural spheres for the evocation of ancestral memories and the renewal of daily records of knowledge.”

⁴³ Eduardo Restrepo emphasizes this disconnect between Afro-Colombian Blackness and the legacy of colonial slavery when in his article, “Ethnicization of Blackness in Colombia: Toward De-Racializing Theoretical and Political Imagination” he discusses how at a workshop in the town of Las Marías in the Colombian Pacific, attendees were dismayed and shocked when a video was played for them dramatizing the forced kidnapping of Africans to the Americas and the abuse and conditions under which they lived and worked. Of this moment Restrepo says “for most of the viewers, it was the first time that they realized that the parents of their grandparents had been enslaved, that they lived there because their ancestors had been brought by force to the Pacific Lowlands to mine the gold two or three hundred years ago, and that Africa was the magical name of the land from which they had come” (299).

the passive subjects of a colonial history who nevertheless make up the foundations of Latin America along with Spaniards and indigenous peoples—and not relevant to present or future contributions to the State. Secondly, linking oral tradition to a sense of Blackness or Africanness completely ignores the fact that oral traditions and the spoken word are common to other populations and societies all around the world, and are regularly practiced in the form of poetry slams or recitations in academic or literary circles. Although these forms have their differences, my point is that oral tradition cannot necessarily be inherently or automatically associated with Afro-Colombians or “tribal” societies only. This being said, there is perhaps, a more practical reason as to why oral tradition continues to prevail as a quintessential characteristic of Afro-Colombianness, which can be linked to the high illiteracy rates in the area and very little access to technology or publishing tools. Thus, rather than write or transcribe a poem or song, the only way for many artists to share their story is through the spoken word. Whatever the case may be, one thing seems to remain clear as well: the oral tradition, even in the Afro-Colombian community, is a dying art form, but is being transformed by younger artists into a global sound.

As Natalia Lozano, author of *Playing Music, Performing Resistance* unsurprisingly affirms, the oral tradition also extends into discussions on the modern Pacific coastal sound. These two categories have a tendency to overlap when analyzing the unique cultural contributions (as the State would call it) of this region of Colombia. Originally labelled by Spanish colonizers and eventually by the church as evil and salacious, Lozano points out that this would greatly affect the way in which Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific Coast were perceived for centuries to come. With such a negative association tied to Black music, culture and oral tradition in Colombia, these artistic forms were excluded from the official national culture, while other local sounds, like the whitewashed vallenato for example, hailing from the Caribbean Coast, were eventually

incorporated into the national music repertoire of Colombia. In short, Lozano concludes that perhaps the music of the Pacific Coast was not appropriated in any way or initiated into a process of whitening because it was simply seen as “too black, too backward” to begin with (59). In the last decades, however, scholars have relabeled Pacific Coastal music in an attempt to diminish its highly negative connotations. Anthropologist Margaret Lantis suggests the term “vernacular music,” which ““does not seem to suggest traditional or primitive, but rather ‘of one’s house,’ of the place. This is the connotation that we want: the culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well defined places and situations” (qtd. in Lozano 50). In the case of the Pacific Coast, the discursive process of the revindication of this music has seen it placed within the context of the everyday lives and functions of Afro-Colombian communities. The instruments typically associated with this vernacular music include the marimba, a type of xylophone said to be of African origin, the *cununo* and *bombo* drums, and the *guasá*, a percussion instrument made of a tubular piece of wood filled with seeds (53). These instruments are used to play a number of local genres, most notably a musical styling known as the *currulao*, among others. In Lozano’s study on Afro-Colombian vernacular music as resistance, she interviews a number of local musicians, *marimberos* (marimba players) and *cantaoras* (*alabado* singers), who talk to her about their local music. Most of the musicians described learning to play the marimba or singing *cantos* or *alabados* as a natural process, as they would simply watch their elders doing so at parties and other events and practice imitating the rhythm until they were able to play it by themselves. In other words, there was no formal training involved and it was characterized as a rather mundane practice to learn, memorize, and practice rhythms whenever possible. However, nowadays, because of the fact that the marimba is not played as widely as it used to be, and due to the commercialization of marimba music as part of the multiracial and pluriethnic campaign that sprung from the 1991 constitutional reform

process, younger generations of musicians are formally taught by the older *marimberos*, now in their 70s and 80s. Marimba music can also be learned in music institutions around Colombia. One of the most shared sentiments of the older generation of musicians was the fact that they no longer feel that their art form is appreciated. Younger Afro-Colombians from the South Pacific have put their own spin on vernacular music, even incorporating it with other genres, which is not necessarily appreciated by their elders. One of the most prominent spaces in which the music of the Pacific Coast has been commercialized, standardized, and transformed is through the Petronio Álvarez Festival. Founded in 1997 by the local government of Valle del Cauca in Cali, Colombia, the aim of the festival is to recognize and celebrate the living legacy of Pacific Coastal music in Colombia. The five-day event attracts audiences from all over the world to see Afro-Colombian musicians compete for first place in various categories. Essentially, this has become the State-sanctioned space in which a limited expression and recognition of nationally approved Blackness may be performed. Despite the fun and celebratory atmosphere of the festival, the impact that the event itself has had on the music of the South Pacific has been perceived negatively by older generations of musicians due to the inauthenticity of the bands themselves, who must follow certain rules, such as no improvising or displays of racial or political messages in the lyrics and music (66). Lozano's ethnographic work and findings are important because they indicate a marked change in the meaning and uses of oral tradition. During an interview with 81-year-old *cantaora* Natividad Orobio, the woman reveals her thoughts on the shift in South Pacific oral and musical tradition as presented in the Petronio Álvarez Festival: "When I went to Petronio it was to sing, to really sing, because we brought the authentic *currulao*, the *currulao* we made before(...)because, now, young people sing a new *currulao* that they have invented, and they sing all at the same time and the *currulao* was not like that. The *glosador* and two people who responded

sang the *currulao*. This is the real *currulao*” (88). Doña Orobio is clearly expressing a certain disdain for the way younger musicians express oral tradition. Lozano affirms that these differences of opinion also show evidence of the transforming personal meaning of the music to different members of the community. Whereas older generations of *marimberos* and *cantaoras* relate their experience to playing music with personal joy and good memories, younger generations of *marimberos* connect their music with creating a sense of collective identity. Unlike their elders, they see the Petronio Álvarez festival as a way to help these underappreciated musical forms gain national, or even international respect and recognition, even if that means altering traditional sounds in order to make them more appealing to a wider audience. Indeed, this has always been the dilemma when addressing the preservation of vernacular or local musical forms. The older generations who fight to keep their music and song as traditional as possible are dwindling, and thus the music remains isolated. Therefore, these art forms risk dying out with them. On the other hand, although incorporating or altering vernacular musical forms into more popular styles of music is a form of preservation, the end product is often much different, and is then labelled as inauthentic. This means that compromise is key in a process of simultaneously preserving and transforming Afro-Colombian oral tradition. This compromise is currently being led by musicians and artists from the genre known as Afro-Colombian hip-hop, or as some have also termed it, New Colombian Music. I argue that these newer and more popular forms of music do not disappear those so-called traditional forms of oral history or musical tradition. Rather, they represent a continuation of an oral tradition that breaks with categorical divisions to express a greater sense of the ecumenically human. In the following paragraphs I will explain the origins of this transformed oral tradition before delving into my analysis of Cynthia Montaña and ChocQuibTown.

The beginnings of the genre known as Afro-Colombian hip-hop were the result of the infiltration of U.S hip-hop culture into the country around the 1990s. Not only was the popularity of American rap music a trend that fit with the growing popularity of urban fashions and styles copied from the United States, it was a genre of music also seen as denunciatory and full of expression. This was something that Afro-Colombian youth found refreshing and identified with in a space where their opinions and thoughts had little to no outlet. Much like the genre in the United States, rap became a tool to visibilize places and people that the State neglected or had chosen to forgot. As hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose comments in her study on rap music and Black culture:

Rappers' emphasis on possession and neighborhoods has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness. It satisfies poor young black people's profound need to have their territories acknowledged, recognized, and celebrated. These are the street corners and neighborhoods that usually serve as lurid backdrops for street crimes on the nightly news. Few local people are given an opportunity to speak, and their points of view are always contained by expert testimony. In rap videos, young mostly male residents speak for themselves and for the community, they speak when and how they wish about subjects of their choosing. These local turf scenes are not isolated voices, they are voices from a variety of social margins that are in dialogue with one another. (11)

Hip-hop imagery and rap lyrics have the unique capability of not just speaking from one voice or experience, but rather are able to reflect the issues and problems of a multitude of subjects who live at the borders of humanity. At the same time, although the rap genre may very well manifest social deviance or militance, the global music industry has come to embrace it as a very important part of its moneymaking empire and one of its biggest sellers. Therefore, rap music has become

irrevocably linked to exploitative capitalist empires who are dedicated to displaying a sellable urban image that is both dangerous, edgy, and exotic but still attractive and enviable. Especially with Latin American rap music, artists are seemingly forced to choose between truthful artistic expression or superficial styles that will sell. Scholar Christopher Dennis, author of several works on Afro-Colombian hip-hop, touches on this dilemma when he says that although there are many rap groups in Colombia that operate locally or nationally and have a following, spending their own money to cover the cost of recording and distributing their CDs, there are very few that have actually been signed to major record labels. According to him, this is due to the fact that most labels will often ask artists to “soften” their lyrics or make their sound more akin to reggaeton. Among rap artists this is seen as selling out, and therefore, they refuse to do so. However, this division between real hip-hop or rap, or *hip-hop social*, as artists call it in Colombia, and commercial rap and hip-hop may prove futile, considering that, as Dennis also reminds us, the whole genre of hip-hop has been co-opted by the global music industry anyway, and any attempt at creating that music—whether commercial or social—is still playing to the market in one way or another. Nonetheless, Dennis believes that Afro-Colombians and other urban youth still see the appeal in hip-hop because they “disregard or are unaware of hip-hop’s ties to powerful multinational conglomerates. This masking, so to speak, can be attributed to the way hip-hop has been globally advertised to the world’s urban poor as a marketing strategy that promotes this youth culture and its styles as an outlaw form, as goods suited for the world’s underdogs, the downtrodden, and oppressed” (192). Although Dennis brings up a valid point about a potentially problematic disconnect between the powers of the music market and those who produce or consume it, one of the many questions that this chapter seeks to tackle is: do the market ties really matter when the product being made is not necessarily intended to be understood in this worldview to begin with? Just as one need not have

the intention of deliberately conveying resistance in her artwork to become an activist, these musical artists' intentions should not be automatically assumed or minimized simply because they *appear* to be giving in to the whims and trends of the music industry, and thus, the same mechanisms that dehumanize them in the first place. Rather, I establish that the music of artists like Gloria “Goyo” Martínez and Cynthia Montaña help conceive of an alternative to our current genre of the human in two major ways. First, as shown in this section, both musicians subvert and transform traditional meanings of oral tradition that act as a powerful tool to continue the dehumanization of Afro-Colombians by extending its boundaries to include popular musical genres. Secondly, I argue that the true significance and power behind the lyrics and music are strategically hidden through the guise of fighting aesthetic oppression, when in reality, each musical piece imagines a new existence all together, one that can only be fully deciphered in story-time. In the next sections of this chapter, this new temporality will be explored as I give specific examples of how performances of Blackness converge with those of staging the new human.

4.2 Gloria “Goyo” Martínez and The “Janus-Faced”⁴⁴ Humanizing Performance of (Re)Voicing Afro-Colombian Blackness

In June of 2020, *Billboard.com* published an open letter penned by Gloria “Goyo” Martínez in the wake of the murder of George Floyd denouncing racism in the United States and Latin

⁴⁴ In Wynter’s article, “The Ceremony Found” she uses the term “Janus-faced” to refer to the contradictory, two-faced construction and function of our current worldview. Here, I use it to describe the double and seemingly contradictory function of the obvious and embedded meanings in Goyo’s music.

America, as well as expressing her support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. In it, she reveals the struggles and racism she has faced as an Afro-Colombian woman and artist from the Pacific Coast, including being kicked out of a public bus in Bogotá and being told on one occasion by a clothing line that “Black does not sell.” She also takes the time to bring attention to a young Afro-Colombian man who was killed by police, Anderson Arboleda. He was stopped by the authorities for breaking COVID-19 quarantine protocol and suffered a blow to the head so severe that he died days later. Speaking of the online reaction to the George Floyd killing, with indignation she states that:

En Latino América [sic], vi muchas publicaciones sobre el tema, también pude evidenciar cómo ponían ejemplos con perros, chistes racistas, y demás, sabiendo que somos países pluriétnicos y multiculturales. Hacían comentarios diciendo que todos los colores son iguales, que lo que importa es la raza humana, QUE TODOS SOMOS IGUALES restándole importancia al racismo y discriminación cuando para nadie es un secreto que NO HAY IGUALDAD. (Flores)⁴⁵

In the end, she advocates for an open conversation on racism that “trasciende fronteras.” Indeed, since her rise to stardom as the lead singer in the band ChocQuibTown, Goyo has become extremely vocal about the racial injustices faced by Afro-Colombian and other Black communities, often drawing parallels or taking inspiration from Black anti-racist movements in the United States as platforms of resistance. She has publicly labelled herself as a proud Afro-Latin American woman who strives to inspire other Black women to be proud of their roots by very openly

⁴⁵ In Latin America, I saw many posts about the topic. I also saw how some included [in their Black Lives Matter posts] examples of dogs, racist jokes, among other things, knowing that we are multiracial and multi-ethnic countries. They would make comments saying all colors are equal and what matters is the human race. [Saying that] we are all equal negates racism and discrimination when we all know that it’s no secret that THERE IS NO EQUALITY (Flores).

embracing her own African heritage with her music and style. Consisting of her now-husband Carlos Yahany “Tostao” Valencia, a professionally trained musician, and her brother Miguel “Slow Mike” Martínez, who along with Goyo, is a self-taught artist, the band had an initial national breakthrough with their first album released in 2006 entitled *Somos Pacífico* and gained international success with their second album *Oro* in 2009. In 2010 they won the Latin Grammy for Best Alternative Song for “De donde vengo yo.” Since then, they have released five more albums: *Eso es lo que hay* (2012), *Behind The Machine* (2013), *El mismo* (2015), for which they won another Latin Grammy award, *Sin miedo* (2018), and *Chocquib House* (2020). Their sound, based strongly on hip-hop rhythms, has been described as a fusion of many different genres, including funk, pop, reggae, and various Latin rhythms (ChocquibTown.com). Although their first two albums were more political, so to speak, with the majority of their songs revealing the injustices and harsh circumstances experienced by their Pacific Coastal communities (all three band members were born and raised in the department of Chocó, Colombia), as well as the resistance, perseverance and strength of these neglected groups in the face of adversity, their later albums seemed to stray from the strong hip-hop rhythms and lyrics of protest to reveal a more commercial sound. For example, after winning their first Latin Grammy, David Fernando García notes that the band went from participating in “Black” musical events such as the Petronio Álvarez Festival, to even bigger and musically diverse ones, like Rock al Parque in Bogotá. He also notes that post-Latin Grammy award:

In 2011 the band made an appearance in the launching of the Colombian national soccer team’s newest attire, which was designed by Adidas; and it also participated in the closing ceremony for the FIFA Youth under 20 World Cup, held in Colombia that same year. This event brought the entire country together since, as the president of the Republic said, it was

seen as an opportunity to ‘show the world what kind of country Colombia is’ (‘Hay que mostrarle’). Finally, in June 2011 ChocQuibTown collaborated with singer Diego Torres to perform the song ‘Creo en América’ (I believe in America), which became the official anthem for the America’s Cup soccer tournament in Argentina. (225)

Participating in international events around Latin America helped to consolidate and market ChocQuibTown not only as an Afro-Latin American group that brought Black rhythms to the world, but also as musical artists who represented Colombian culture and music more broadly. This turn in public image also conveniently fit within the State mission to build an external image of a multicultural and pluriethnic country, one that condemned racism and condoned diversity. In the years to come, ChocQuibTown went on to collaborate with some reggaeton, Latin pop and alternative music superstars, including Sech, Zion & Lennox, Farruko, Becky G, Carlos Vives, Nicky Jam, Santana, and more. While this change has led to worldwide renown and critical praise for the group, some have criticized them for selling out, or betraying their roots in exchange for fame. However, in an interview with Christopher Dennis, one of the bands members, Tostao reveals that the group wants to:

spread their music and its messages beyond traditional hip-hop circles (in an attempt to widen its appeal), and therefore, they feel a need to ‘dress up’ their messages in more danceable and attractive melodies. During our conversations, he often drew on examples from reggae icons such as Peter Tosh and Bob Marley who produced aesthetically popular music, but with lyrics that evoked thought and consciousness.

Furthermore, describing himself as a ‘true’ musician, having “formally studied percussion and jazz,” for Tostao, there is a natural inclination to want to grow as an artist and experiment with new sounds. Finally, he clarifies that the real traitors are those who blindly imitate U.S. rap styles

without making it their own. Here, Tostao is specifically referring to incorporating traditional Afro-Colombian instruments, sounds and folklore into the rap and hip-hop sound. Indeed, scholars like Dennis and García have talked about this unique mixture of the traditional with other notions of the urban and modern, but have only tended to do so with ChocQuibTown's earliest works, and therefore, their most outwardly politically conscious music. When it comes to analyzing their songs and lyrics, scholars tend to stick to the same tracks, such as the Pacific Coastal anthems "De donde vengo yo," "Oro," and "Somos Pacífico," while refusing to go into a deeper analysis of their later songs, except to say that this has proven that they have strayed from their original sound. I argue that this strategy minimizes and is detrimental to the powerful messages that ChocQuibTown's music seeks to express in (re)voicing the human. Additionally, no one has critically examined the essential role of Goyo herself. As the main vocalist, most recognizable face, and the most outspoken of the group, she represents one of the few female Afro-Colombian voices in rap and alternative musical genres. As I will show throughout this chapter, the power of her voice is the main catalyst that drives their subtle humanizing mission. My analysis will reveal how Goyo, along with her bandmates, is able to stage a Janus-faced performance of Colombian Blackness, while simultaneously (re)attaching this sense of ethnicity to the human within a global and superficial music industry, all while under the guise of prosthetic oppression. I dissect two of their songs, "Pescao envenenao" and "El mismo" as examples.

4.3 The Underside of Conspiratorial Temporalities: "Pescao envenenao" and "El mismo"

I have chosen to analyze these songs (and their accompanying music videos and recorded performances) not only because they reflect the changes in ChocQuibTown's musical trajectory

expressed above, but more so because of their manifestation of the Janus-faced nature of ChocQuibTown’s musical mission to create a new worldview. While the first song, “Pescao envenao,” and the accompanying performance evoke ChocQuibTown at the beginning of their international fame, “El mismo” represents the commercialized sound that has led some to regard the band as sellouts or unoriginal. However, I believe that this shift is very intentional, and allows the band to instill a double meaning and function into their lyrics. While catering to an image or performance of Blackness that they know is acceptable to the State—which seemingly keeps them in the rung of the nonhuman—on the contrary, they begin to slowly chip away at the foundation of these harmful discourses of Afro-Colombianness.

“Pescao envenao,” originally released on the group’s first album, also appeared on their internationally successful 2010 release entitled *Oro*. The title of the song, which means “poisoned fish,” is a reference to the issue of mercury poisoning in the Colombian Pacific. Mercury, used to extract gold from the many mines in the area, has severely polluted bodies of water and the fish and seafood that is consumed from them, causing major birth defects, severe illness and even death in Pacific coastal communities. The chorus and first verses of the song read:

Yo no me como ese pescao así sea del Chocó Ese pescao envenenao ése no lo como yo	I’m not eating that fish as long as it’s from Chocó I am not eating that poisoned fish
Mucho ojo mi gente que quieren envenenarte la cabeza con pescao malo en la mesa Pero eso a mí no me estresa	Be careful my people because they want to poison your head with bad fish on the table But that does not stress me out
Ojo mucho ojo que el tráfico de influencias De gente que sin decencia quieren verte en decadencia porque la envidia es mala La gente sale con vainas raras ¡eh! Problemas traen balas	Watch out, be careful because the traffic of influences of indecent people want to see you in decline because jealousy is bad People come out with strange things Problems bring bullets
La próxima vez te doy en la cara Por darme tu pescao envenenao Te llevo en la mala	Next time I’ll hit you in the face For giving me that poisoned fish You are on my bad side

Set to a self-proclaimed “funky boogaloo,” a Latin rhythm made popular among Hispanic communities in New York City in the 1960s, the rhythm is upbeat and dance friendly. However, the lyrics are tinged with a sense of aggressiveness, anger and revenge. Goyo sings the chorus while both Tostao and Slow Mike rap the verses. The song starts with Goyo’s simple statement “I am not eating that fish as long as it is from Chocó,” and then the other members of the group continue the song with a strongly worded, socially conscious rap. Even from the very first verses, it is easy to tell that the *pescao envenenao*, in addition to referring to fish, is also referencing State corruption and the overall violent, lethal and intentional subjugation of Black communities. Both Tostao and Slow Mike evoke a somewhat threatening yet confident stance as they rap the lyrics. They let the listener know that they know what is going on, and urge others in their community to be vigilant of the threats that seek to devastate them and also to know their worth. Slow Mike raps that “Quieren verte en decadencia/Porque la envida es mala,” suggesting that the government wants to see Black communities suffer, not because they deserve it, but because they possess something unique, beautiful and special that outsiders envy and want to steal and destroy. He even takes it a step further when he says “La próxima vez te doy en la cara/Por darme este pescao envenenao.” This sends a message that Black communities will not take the abuse passively. Rather, they will rebel against it, actively defending their communities to the best of their ability. Tostao continues this tone in his part of the rap, which warns “A otro perro con ese hueso/Te rompo la boca y allí no ponen yeso [stop pulling my leg/I’ll knock your teeth out and they don’t put a cast there].” Tostao’s lyrics continue:

¡El fanatismo!
No deja ver por encima del
ocultismo
Manejan los políticos y se llevan a los
mismos

Fanaticism does not let one see
past occultism
The politicians are in control
and they make off with the same
ones

Pelaos, ¿qué hacen en esa estera?
No coman el pescao que les quieren dar la pela

Poor people, what are you doing
on that mat?
Do not eat that fish because they
wanna kill you

¡bidi bidi, dududen dududem!
Estás cerca de mí y no me quieres ¡qué
bien!

bidi bidi. dududen dududem
You are close to me and you don't
want me. Good!

Me quieres ver pasando al otro lado
Por eso es que me das tu pescao envenenao
¡ja ja! ¡qué risa me da!

You want to see me go to the other
side
That is why you give me your
poisoned fish
Haha! How funny it is!

Here we read another call to consciousness and also get another taste of the irony of the situation. First, Tostao claims that “El fanatismo/no deja ver por encima del/ocultismo.” Although this could refer to various things, I interpret this lyric as expressing the way in which the fervor and enthusiasm around political discourse blinds people to the lies that politicians tell. In particular, Tostao could be referring to the long associated but erroneous stereotype of Black communities being dangerous or sinister because they practice certain forms of occultism, such as syncretism and idol worship, spiritual healing, and other supposedly “dark arts.” People cannot see past these harmful stereotypes and farses because of the performed authority of government officials. Another potential interpretation of this lyric is that while members of the Black communities themselves may associate their plight with divine, religious or supernatural will, they do not realize that their poor lot in life has been orchestrated by the State, and they do not have to accept it. The rapper also demands clearly in the next verse that people not buy the fish or take the bait so to

speak, because they will be killed. Lastly, although the situation about which the group is singing is quite devastating, both Tostao and Slow Mike express joy and laughter in the lyrics they rap, not due to the situation itself, but because they are in on the trick, and the State has been caught red-handed. Now that they know what is happening, they and members of the community will no longer have to fall victim to the “poisoned fish,” whatever form it may take. It is also interesting how, in other parts of the song, a certain musical language is established to refer to the corruption of State officials. Phrases such as “No me gusta tu tumbao (I don’t like your swing)” and “Si un día te llame sonero/hoy eres peor que político embustero (If one day I call you a *son* musician, you are worse than a lying politician)” establishes an alternative language to discuss corruption, greed, and the callous nature of the state towards Afro-Colombians (www.lyrics.com). Nonetheless, despite these fun musical analogies, overall the message contained in the song is quite direct. One might say that the power of the song itself is contained in the rap of Tostao and Slow Mike. However, I contend that the real power of the song is rooted in Goyo’s singing of the chorus. This is perhaps one of the greatest examples of the ingenious tactics used to further the life of the song on the radio and in public venues, thus transmitting their message further. Goyo’s simple, yet melodious and smooth singing of the small chorus as a constantly repeated line in the song acts as the harmless and catchy hook that entices the listener to sing along, and perhaps listen more closely. The words “Yo no me como ese pescao así sea del Chocó /Ese pescao envenenao ése no lo como yo,” also adds a cooling, fun, and peaceful counterpoint to the hot, angry and quickly rapped lyrics of Tostao and Slow Mike, which are perhaps, rapped too fast for some to catch the deeper meaning of the song at first. In the end, it is Goyo’s voice that holds the key to selling “Pescao envenenao,” and pushing it into the mainstream. Despite this, it appears that this buffer did not last for long. “Pescao envenenao,” although a recognizable ChocQuibTown tune, has not

been one of their most popular songs. The band has not produced a music video for it, and the audio track, posted on ChocQuibTown's YouTube channel, only has a total of 954 views since being published in 2017. I also failed to find any live or concert performances of the song on the internet. The only exception was a video of ChocQuibTown performing in studio for Radio Gladys Palmera, posted on the radio station's YouTube channel in 2010. With over 5 million views, this acoustic version shows the band at the beginning of their growing popularity, as well as their raw talent. Happy, smiling and dressed down, the band members even initiate a freestyle rap in which Tostao and Slow Mike exhibit their skills. While the top comments posted by viewers praise the band's talents and their representation of Afro-Colombian—and more broadly—Afro-Latin American culture, music and *sabor* (flavor), very few actually address or comment on the topic of the song, perhaps proof of the pacifying power of Goyo's chorus. In the end, however, it becomes clear that, given the song's lack of popularity, at least compared to their other songs, perhaps its lyrics were too controversial for the Urban Latin niche of the music industry.

On the other hand, "El mismo," from ChocQuibTown's 2015 album of the same name marks a transition that sees the band playing with newer sounds while also resorting to more subtle lyrics. "El mismo" expresses the same ethnic pride as "Pescao envenenao" and speaks of the racism and discrimination faced by Afro-Colombians on a daily basis. However, unlike their previous song, the perpetrators are not named. In other words, the State is not mentioned explicitly in any moment of the song. Instead of developing an accusatory discourse, the lyrics emphasize unity, and urge the listener to see that, in the end, everyone is a human being and deserves respect. Musically, the song is a fusion of different genres, borrowing from rap, funk, jazz, and incorporating the marimba, one of ChocQuibTown's signature sounds. Again, Goyo sings the first verses of the song and the chorus:

Ellos no saben no
Lo bien que me siento
Ellos no saben
Todo lo que represento

They don't know, no
How good I feel
They don't know
All that I represent

Si de pronto se le riega el café
Échale la culpa al mismo
Si se le quema el cucayo biambe
Échale la culpa al mismo

If all of a sudden their coffee
spills
Blame it on the same one
If their rice burns and sticks to
the pan
Blame it on the same one

As ChocQuibTown has explained in interviews, the chorus of the song refers to the way in which minorities, in this case, Afro-Colombians, become scapegoats, and are constantly blamed anytime something bad happens within the country. Although the lyrics refer to very specific and small unfortunate happenings, such as someone spilling coffee or burning their rice, these are clearly euphemisms that highlight the severity of this racist cycle and are a reflection of how, more broadly, Black people are blamed for the ills of the country, and moreover, for their own miserable condition. Despite this, the lyrics express a confidence, pride, care, and a sense of rising above prosthetic oppression. Goyo sings that she dreams of going far with her band “con mi melanina, like Lupita N’Yongo (with my melanin, like Lupita N’Yongo),” and also imagines a type of homecoming in the Chocó:

Meterme una fiesta
Abrazar mi gente
Lista la comida, a cantar que empiece
Libre como el viento, como el pensamiento
Porque lo que escribo, de verdad lo siento

Dale un poco de agua, a los muchachitos
Para que no se atranquen con el plátano frito
Que prueben un poco, de otros sabores
Para que no se asusten cuando vean otros colores

Sírvale sancocho a los pelaitos
Y un pedazo de queso, que conozcan lo rico
No le pongan chanclas, que anda a pie pelado
Y que se me aprenda un pasito de currulao

Go into a party
Hug my people
The food is ready, let's sing, let it begin
Free as the wind, like thought
Because what I write is really what I feel

Give the kids some water
So that they don't choke on the fried plantain
Let them try a bit of other flavors
So that they don't get scared when they see Other colors

Serve sancocho to the poor
And a piece of cheese, so that they know how good it is
Don't give them sandals, let them walk barefoot
And they can learn to dance *currulao*

In the above lyrics, Goyo not only evokes a sense of family, love, tradition, and mutual support, but she also takes the lyrics one step further, enunciating a path toward the human, rather than just Black pride and self-assertion. It is notable that she speaks of “going far” or being successful with her band, even though at the time of this album’s release, the band was already well established, successful and internationally acclaimed. I argue that there is more to be said about this dream to “llegar lejos” than it may seem. Perhaps Goyo is not just speaking of going far with her band, but instead going beyond the constraints of always being labelled as “El mismo” (which in this case means Black scapegoat/nonhuman/producer of marketable folklore). Furthermore, she expresses a desire to go back to Chocó and teach the children to not fear other colors, or different ethnicities and cultures. This could very well indicate teaching children a completely different way of looking at the world. Just as Goyo suggests in the lines above, thought is free like the wind. In other words, the power of the mind has no limits and has the capability to take one beyond this current worldview. Finally, Slow Mike rounds out the song with one last verse before the chorus is once again repeated and the song ends:

No necesita mucha inteligencia
Tampoco haber estudiado 7 años en Francia
Para aprender sobre la tolerancia
Y que no existe ninguna diferencia
Si reconocemos que somos la misma gente
Que nos une un sentimiento de echar para adelante
Que aunque no tengamos el mismo pasaporte
Eso no te hace diferente. (www.genius.com)

You do not need a lot of intelligence
Or have studied in France for 7 years
To learn about tolerance
And that there exists no difference
If we recognize that we are the same people
That a feeling of perseverance unites us
That although we do not have the same
Passport
That does not make you different

Slow Mike further enforces Goyo's conception of a new worldview as he raps that between people, there is no difference. This statement, interpreted in a literal sense, is not logical when thought about within our current truth-for-terms, and can only be accurate in a different space and time, one that these lyrics, voices and melodies are helping to build. Furthermore, the lyrics seemingly condemn academic or institutional study, insinuating that despite all the "intelligence" one may acquire, this kind of learning will never teach people how to treat one another as human beings. Essentially, Slow Mike is revealing the weakness of our current ways of thinking and challenges currently held notions of intellectual hierarchy. Alternatively, he suggests that it is a feeling (perhaps love?) that unites people and lifts them up. All it takes is a recognition of the false and performed divisions that separate us.

In the song, the Janus-faced double meaning format is clear. Unlike "Pescao envenao," "El mismo" does not reveal itself so directly. People who do not resonate with the experience of daily discrimination and racism may not at first understand who "El mismo" is referring to, however, for those who understand the message, the expression contained within the lyrics become invaluable relics and archives documenting their nonhuman status, and a call to take advantage of this conspiratorial time to gather as many stories as possible. The performance of Blackness remains clear as ChocQuibTown makes reference to the cultural elements that they and others use

to identify themselves as both uniquely Black (like the *currulao* dance), but also faithful Colombian citizens (in the lyrics they mention traditional Colombian dishes like sancocho, and plátano frito). However, they simultaneously evoke a willingness to break with categorizations of race and region by reminding people of the similarities they share because of their humanness alone. Although critics say that ChocQuibTown has lost their original Afro-Colombian rap sound, or shamelessly betrayed their roots to commercialize Pacific Coastal culture, it is possible to glean a deeper meaning from these changes when interpreted outside of purely Western-bourgeois capitalist terms. As Diana Taylor reminds us, when it comes to performing, and in this case, performing race, identity, time, and trauma:

It provokes emotions it claims only to represent, evokes memories and grief that belong to some other body. It conjures up and makes visible not just the live but the powerful army of the always already living. The power of seeing through performance is the recognition that we've seen it all before—the fantasies that shape our sense of self, of community, that organize our scenarios of interaction, conflict, and resolution. (*The Archive* 143)

If we envision ChocQuibTown's performances in this way then, and specifically Goyo's sonic invocations, the compilation of sounds, both traditional and commercial, supposedly Black or otherwise, is not what really matters. Rather, it is the meaning behind them and the fact that together, they harness the power to evoke long-buried emotions, familiar dreams of identity and community, and to a certain point, act as guide to what our futures might look like, as long as we are willing to listen, rather than dismiss, when at first glance, the music defies—or even conforms—to typical or expected representations of Blackness.

4.4 Cynthia Montaña: (Re)Voicing Aloud and the Crosscurrents of Conspiratorial Time

Cynthia Montaña, singer-songwriter and self-proclaimed cultural manager and social communicator, started her musical career in her native Cali, Colombia in 2008. Since then, she has gone on to release two major albums—*Urbano litoral* in 2011 and *Ideas* in 2016⁴⁶—which have won her some national acclaim. In 2019, she released an EP entitled *Live Sessions*, in which she reinterprets four of her most popular songs. Her most notable musical collaborations to date have been with Colombian music superstar Carlos Vives, having collaborated with him on two songs, one appearing on his 2017 Latin-Grammy-nominated album *Vives* entitled “Los niños olvidados,” and the single “Déjame quererte” (2019). Although perhaps not one of the most commercially successful acts on the Colombian music scene, she has gained substantial attention with her live performances at prestigious national and international music festivals, as well as for her thought-provoking lyrics, whose themes address social justice, abuse against women and LGBTQ rights, internal migration, environmental pollution, and the sociopolitical racism, abandonment and violence against Black communities (cynthiamontano.com.co). Indeed, her music is a reflection of her activism. She regularly participates in social events to bring awareness to the suffering of Black communities, protest violence against women, or promote the protection of Pacific Coastal culture. She is an active supporter, collaborator and ally of La Escuela Comunitaria de Arte Lila, an organization whose mission is to work with youth from Cali and Aguablanca to create and perform art, music and Colombian folk dance that promote peace and aim to protect Afro-Colombian social and cultural values. The artist also remains quite active with the Casa Cultural

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that *Ideas*, although a separate work, is essentially an album of remixed greatest hits from the previous album, meant to reflect a more acoustic, world music sound (cynthiamontano.com.co).

El Chontaduro, an organization based in Cali that seeks to promote peace and equality through the arts and provide a safe space for expression, healing and peaceful communication. Montaña prides herself on infusing her music with everything from the soft percussion of marimbas, drums, and maracas to the heavy-hitting, energetic beats of rap, hip-hop, and pop. However, she continues to identify most heavily with Pacific Coastal—or folkloric—music. Much like ChocQuibTown, many of her songs, especially from her first album, constitute an homage to the culture of the Pacific Coast. However, from the outset, it becomes clear that her music seeks to appease no one. While the members of ChocQuibTown may have eventually adopted a more subtle approach to promoting a humanizing Blackness, Montaña’s pleas for change are much more direct. This can be seen in several of her songs, including the tracks “Invasión costeña” and “Las mil y ningún mujeres.” Both songs indicate a transition from a budding artist to a determined activist, also signaled by some aesthetic changes, as she departs from a relatively normal urban style of dress in order to display her now signature turban and colorful clothing, a clear marker of pride in her African descent. I argue that Montaña’s artistry is driven by her strong belief in her mission to improve and heal humanity, as well as a determination to live her activism aloud. This tactic, in addition to the fusion of her music, the product of a change in consciousness, displays a turn toward the true human that is necessarily uncomfortable, continually aggressive, and yet simultaneously cathartic. While one might consider her use of Pacific Coastal music and culture as well as her own choice of style to be essentialist, she assures her listeners that she is aware of the stakes of her influence and the power that the music industry exercises over her, acknowledging that:

Nosotros somos muy sensibles a la música, el sonido, al arte y las grandes industrias lo saben y por eso utilizan estas herramientas para vendernos sus productos o sus ideales o la forma en cómo quieren tenernos sometidos. También es necesario que nosotros como

artistas estemos conscientes de ese poder que tenemos en las manos y que pensemos cómo queremos incidir en nuestra sociedad, en las personas. Personalmente, lo hago como una estrategia de sanación, como un sentir y una propuesta de transformación de sociedad y humanidad.⁴⁷

With that declaration, it becomes evident that Montaña is on a mission to re-transform the culture of the music industry, and thus, the culture of Man, for the better, even if that means dwelling at the very margins of complete and total fame. In the end, her music and style are in no way essentialist, but rather constitute a reclamation of and a pushing-back-against the mechanisms that keep us subordinate to our own consciousness during this conspiratorial time.

4.4.1 Invasions of The Human and Threats to Man: Conspiratorial Music Stylings

Cynthia Montaña presented one of her very first recorded performances in a 2007 documentary film entitled *Negropacífico*. The film project examined the massive migration of Black Colombians from the rural Pacific regions of Guapi and Chocó to the urban district of Aguablanca in Cali in the wake of the severe violence suffered in the former regions due to the nearly fifty-year drug war. The documentary made use of local talent, recruiting Montaña and rappers La Ru-K and Pity Escobar to record a song called “Invasión costeña” and participate in the production of an accompanying music video that reflected the theme of the project. More than just lending her voice, Montaña was in charge of the field production and the soundtrack of the

⁴⁷ “We are very sensitive to music, sound, art and large industries know this and that is why they use these tools to sell us their products or their ideals or the way they want to suppress us. It is also necessary for us as artists to be aware of the power that we have in our hands and to think about how we want to influence our society and people. Personally, I do it as a healing strategy, as a feeling and a proposal for the transformation of society and humanity.”

documentary. She describes it as one of the defining moments of her musical trajectory, having allowed her the opportunity to travel to the Pacific Coast and experience the local music first-hand. The artist explains that the project gave her the impulse to incorporate Pacific Coastal rhythms into her music, rather than dedicate herself to solely the rap or urban genre (Villanueva). Montaña would later re-record the song in 2015 for her full-length debut album, *Urbano litoral*, with a different guest artist and musical arrangement. The slight lyrical changes made to the song, as well as the striking visual difference in the music videos, express a transition in its message, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In the original version, the song opens by commanding the listener to: “venga y baile hoy/que esta es la recopilación/de la raza que dejó la identidad que es el folclor.”⁴⁸ The track opens with the classic Afro-Colombian sounds of marimba and *guasá*, which overlap in the first few seconds of the song with the voice of La Ru-K, who announces the singers, and proclaims that the song is “de Colombia para el mundo.”⁴⁹ The song continues, “Marimba, pesca y el sabor es la expresión de mi región/invasión costeña soy, que viva Guapi, el Chocó.”⁵⁰ This chorus clearly establishes the song as a cultural pride anthem for Afro-Colombians from the Pacific Coastal region and Aguablanca, with the words reflecting an ethnic discourse that celebrates the distinguishing features of Afro-diasporic customs. After the chorus, La Ru-K opens her rap by stating: “Comunidades negras ocupan las tierras baldías” and continues with a brief oral history of the communities of the Pacific, first naming important rivers and communities in the region including Timbiquí, Pajes, and Tolatá. In the lyrics that follow she declares:

⁴⁸ “Come and dance today/because this is the review/ of the race that left the identity that is folklore.”

⁴⁹ “from Colombia to the world.”

⁵⁰ “Marimba, fishing, and flavor is the expression of my region/ I am coastal invasion, long live Guapi, el Chocó.”

Son ríos de la Cuenca del Pacífico	They are rivers of the Pacific Basin
Negros que practican la identidad que es el folclor	Black people that practice the identity That is folklore
Con canto y mucha danza es la más grande expresión	With song and dance it is the greatest Expression
A no dejar morir lo que el ancestro nos dejó	To not let die what the ancestor left us
Cultura propia, la identidad de nuestra historia	Our own culture, the identity of our History
Que se distingue por el rezo, casa y la honra	Which is defined by prayer, home and Honor
Un curandero pa' que le quite el ojo al niño	A witchdoctor to take away the evil eye
la comadrona en el parto te recibe el hijo	From the child The midwife delivers your baby

Besides reaffirming cultural traits normally associated with Black communities, I argue that there is also something else to La Ru-K and Cynthia's lyrics. In the lines above, there is a clear spatial paradox. La Ru-K states that Black communities occupy the so-called "empty" lands of the Pacific region. The term "tierras baldías" refers specifically to the language used in Law 70 to describe the lands on which these communities are built. La Ru-K and Montaña point to this contradiction, establishing that these empty, uncultivated lands are actually very much occupied, and have been so for centuries. This statement helps to lyrically undo a violent historical erasure and draws attention to the incorrectness of the term, or rather, the racial invisibility and symbolic death enacted by the phrase, which implies that the Afro-descendants of the region do not count as land-occupying citizens, or even as full human beings. Therefore, this simple phrase—even while it is framed within the State-approved terms of folklore—manages to recreate an oral history that not only reestablishes natural land rights, but also directly contradicts the State itself, thus initiating a breakdown of a dehumanizing discourse.

Cynthia also manages to evoke and reframe memories of forced immigration and displacement in the lyrics that she sings in the original version of the song. She immediately establishes a link between the conspiratorial present, the past and the future as she sings "Voy a

contarte de lo que de boca en boca/ ha llegado hasta mi generación.”⁵¹ She then goes on to sing a story that her grandparents passed down to her:

Y me pregunto por qué fue que dejaron
El mar, la piangua, la raya⁵² y el coco
Y me responden con un sabio pregón
Vengo de otra tierra
buscando el futuro y la esperanza
Huyendo de la guerra
La pobreza y la matanza
Y entonces me pregunto
Si habrá otro distrito de Aguablanca
Que albergue toda esa gente
que huye por la misma causa

And I wonder why they left
The ocean, the *piangua*, the stingray
And the coconut
I come from another land
Looking for the future and hope
Escaping from the war
Poverty and killing
And then I wonder
If there might be another District of
Aguablanca
That houses all these people
That run away for the same cause

This part of the song encapsulates both a review of oral history as well as a simultaneous questioning on the part of Montaña about the present and future internal refugees that will inevitably share the same story as her grandparents. I argue that the retelling of her family story and her questioning can be read in two ways. First, Montaña could be indirectly criticizing the lack of action on the part of the State to protect the communities from the war and violence that has caused her family to run in the first place, and in her wondering, may also be emphasizing that, in case it has been forgotten, it is the State’s responsibility to provide adequate resources to affected populations, as she thinks about whether others that were in her grandparents’ situation will even have a place to run to. Secondly, the second half of the lyrics express a desire to find another “Distrito de Aguablanca”—that accommodates all of those literally running for their lives—outside of Colombia, or even outside of this world. In the lyrics there could lie the recognition and

⁵¹ “I am going to tell you what, by word of mouth/ has come to my generation.”

⁵² *Piangua* is a type of mollusk that grows at the base of mangroves and is a food staple in the cuisine of the Colombian Pacific. The stingray is also another animal that frequents the waters of the Pacific Colombian Coast and has come to be incorporated into the legends and folklore of the region.

realization that perhaps, in this conspiratorial time, there is not quite yet a place to run, but that one day there will be, through the labyrinth of stories, truths, and petitions of humanness that are coming together now.

Another important factor of Montaña's work is not just the sonic and lyrical affirmations in her songs, but the distinct ways in which she locates and changes the locus of her music through music videos as well. According to Rose, "Music video is a collaboration in the production of popular music; it revises meanings, provides preferred interpretations of lyrics, creates a stylistic and physical context for reception, and valorizes the iconic presence of the artist" (9). Therefore, Montaña's 2007 music video for "Invasión costeña" and the one filmed in 2015 contain some distinct differences that are worth looking into further. One of the first major changes to the music video is the different location. The music video that accompanies the original version of the song bounces between scenes of the district of Aguablanca and the rural Pacific region, most notably Guapi and Chocó, as the three rap artists sing about the folkloric traditions brought to Cali and made known to the rest of Colombia from the emigrants of the Pacific region, who came to the city seeking a better life. Other scenes include depictions of Afro-Colombian fisherman, crowds of Afro-Colombian children and youth who gleefully follow Montaña and company as they walk along the streets of the various local neighborhoods and markets eating peach palm (a fruit predominantly grown in the Pacific region), and the artists themselves rapping straight into the camera on a crowded local bus. The music video clearly represents a turf mentality and sends a message that this space is the true home of Afro-Colombians and Black culture. It also appears to support, whether intentionally or inadvertently, the State-approved geographical discourse that

confines Black populations to just the Pacific Coast and the district of Aguablanca, which although an urban area, is still completely at the margins of the Colombian metropolis. This essentially erases the substantial Black populations living in Bogotá, Medellín and elsewhere in Colombia.



Figure 2. Montaña in the original music video for “Invasión Costeña”⁵³



Figure 3. Pity Escobar raps into the camera in “Invasión Costeña”

In 2015, Montaña revisited “Invasión costeña,” this time infusing the track with a jazzy rhythm. The marimba is still present and very clearly heard, but this time the instrument is accompanied by the clarinet, electric guitar, and bass drums. The song opens with the percussion instruments first and then a few seconds into the song, the high, blasting notes of a clarinet set the

⁵³ Figures 2 and 3 are screenshots taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKy-11uXcxg>.

stage for Montaña to start singing. The images presented in the music video are very different from the original, now consisting of scenes cutting between Montaña singing and relaxing with people of all colors and backgrounds on a bright and sandy beach on the Archipelago of San Andrés. These scenes are further intercut with a live performance of the artist at a concert, her musicians enthusiastically harmonizing their instruments to her vocal expression. Adding to these scenes are shots overlooking the vast ocean. The heightened quality and diverse shots of the music video along with the more complex melodies used for this second version can certainly be attributed to Montaña's spike in popularity and visibility as an artist, and thus her ability to have the resources to produce such a work, which were not available to her at the beginning of her career. At first glance, this re-recording of the song seems to reflect a desire for the greater expansion of the Afro-Colombian sector into the fold of the nation. Although images of the marimba still remain, the landscape of the Pacific itself, the peach palm, the rowers on the river, the frolicking Black children, and the sign advertising the *curandero* are nowhere in sight.



Figure 4. Montaña in the newest version of the music video “Invasión Costeña”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Figures 4 and 5 are screenshots from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sz_mBUJgXGM.



Figure 5. Montaño singing in the streets of San Andrés in the second version of “Invasión Costeña”

Evidently, in this newer version, Montaño attempts to further disassociate Afro-Colombian identity with these specific visual markers, and instead strives to encompass it into a normative cultural sphere as if to say “Afro-Colombians are real citizens, too, and not just folkloric memories.” On the other hand, if we read into the change in location of San Andrés instead of the Colombian mainland, there exists an even deeper connection between marginality and displacement that once again survives on ecumenically human connections, rather than ones based exclusively on gender, race or any other socio-politically invented category. The Archipelago of San Andrés—as both an exotic destination, a site of Afro-Caribbean culture, a space valued for its unique biodiversity, and an island deeply affected by prosthetic oppression and State violence—shares a similar narrative to the Pacific Coast.⁵⁵ This transcendence of geographical boundaries simultaneously misplaces territorial notions of Afro-Colombian Blackness while also calling on others in the realm of the nonhuman/prosthetically oppressed to jump into action and enter conspiratorial time. Furthermore, Montaño’s physical appearance changes in this video, as she now sports her turban, which may function here as a symbol of resistance to Western standards of beauty and an embrace of Afrodescendant culture. In other scenes, she is seen with colorful dress,

⁵⁵ For deeper insight into the history of the Archipelago of San Andres, please see chapter 6, where I expand on the unique roots of this Colombian territory.

braids, natural hair, and playing the *guasá* in her live performance. In this version, the lyrics also go through some slight changes. For example, whereas before, Montaña sings about her grandparents conveying to her that they came to Aguablanca in search of a better life and to escape war and violence, she omits the lyrics that identify her grandparents as the originators of the story and puts herself in their place, singing “vengo de otra tierra buscando el futuro y la esperanza” as if she were the one to have lived this story. As Diana Taylor reminds us, “the transmission of traumatic memory from victim to witness involves the shared and participatory act of telling and listening associated with live performance. Bearing witness is a live process, a doing, an event that takes place in real time, in the presence of a listener who ‘comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event.’” (167). The story of Cynthia’s grandparents, having been transmitted to her through the performance of storytelling, now is her own to tell as she becomes co-owner of the trauma. At the center of this process is the blurring of lines of time and space where stories are inherited, told, and made one’s own through emotions of pain. Through this, there comes a continuous striving to find something better. With her lyrics and video, Montaña demonstrates how sound and its images have the possibility of demanding, imagining and theorizing another existence. She also takes a different approach to the tactic of “invasion” in other songs. Rather than it being clearly territorial, I argue that she also practices a mental and discursive invasion, one that is initiated by continually willing to be a co-owner to trauma as well as an agent of transformation.

The song “Las mil y ningún mujeres” (roughly translated as “the one thousand and none women”) was first released on the 2011 album *Urbano litoral*, and was re-recorded and rearranged in a more acoustic version on her second album, *Ideas*, in 2016. I will be focusing on the first version of the song, where a more powerful hip-hop influence, mixed with haunting female

background vocals combine to accompany lyrics that tell the stories of women who have desperately tried to escape from domestic abuse and State violence. The song itself has no accompanying video, but the lyrics themselves speak very loud and clear. “Las mil y ningún mujeres” starts strong as Montaña raps:

Escucha sus fuertes pisadas	Hear her heavy footsteps
Tu corazón se agita	Your heart beats faster
Eres presa de una hambrienta manada	You are prey to a hungry pack
Corres más, más	You run more, more
Por la húmeda selva	Through the humid jungle
Es imposible pero esperanza	It's impossible but you conserve the
De vivir conservas	hope to live

The opening lines evoke images in the listener of a woman running from a hungry, violent, and predatory threat that vows to take her life with every step that she takes. She may run fast, but there is no guarantee that she will get out of this “humid jungle” alive. In the following lines, Montaña’s song branches into a series of narratives in which she recounts tragic stories of women who have been abused and have lost their lives as a consequence. In particular, there are three stories: a woman violently forced to abort her baby, a sixteen-year-old, Ana María, raped, tortured and killed for attempting to defend her rights, and a woman in a physically abusive relationship who ends up contracting AIDS from her partner and dying. Towards the end of the song, Montaña brings home the message that these women could be anybody:

Es otra ama de casa
Otra obrera
Otra prostituta
Otra guerrillera
Otra madre soltera
Otra sindicalista
Otra de derecha
Otra izquierdista
Otra blanca
Otra negra
Otra india
Otra niña
Otra desplazada
Otra periodista
Otra mujer más que muere
Pero a quien importa

It's another housewife
Another worker
Another prostitute
Another guerilla
Another single mother
Another union member
Another right-wing woman
Another leftist
Another white woman
Another Black woman
Another indigenous woman
Another little girl
Another displaced woman
Another journalist
Yet another woman who dies
But who really cares

Finally, she states that violence does not discriminate, with the last lines of the song demanding:

Que a ti te importe seas
Hombre o mujer
Podría tu hija ser
Tu madre, tu esposa
También usted

Let it be important to you,
whether you are a man or a woman
Your child it could be
Your mother, your wife
Even you

Obviously, Montañó's intention is to bring attention to the very serious issue of violence against women. The long litany of victims that she lists blurs the lines between social hierarchies as she notes that everyone from prostitutes to politicians and journalists get flung into the realm of the nonhuman for being categorized as the weaker sex. Women are often blamed for attracting the very violence perpetrated against them, and thus left to fend for themselves. Cynthia, however, demands her listeners to care about the issue of violence against women, urging them to see that this is not just a "woman problem" simply because it happens to women. Rather, it is a human problem that all are affected by and can contribute to resolving. In her lyrics, Montañó creates a true sense of discomfort as she angrily raps the unsettling truths that make up the stories of these

women. For example, she refuses to shy away from describing a disturbing visual image of the lifeless and disfigured body of 16-year-old Ana María when she proclaims:

Con una condena	With a sentence
De violación tortura y muerte	Of rape, torture, and death
Sus pechos mutilados	Her mutilated breasts
Exhibieron ante la gente	They exhibited before the people

She also characterizes fighting for one's rights as a "pecado" or sin, emphasizing the point that, contrary to popular belief, these women were never looking for trouble, but as any cycle of social death would have it, they are hunted and killed for the "sin" of simply trying to live decently. It is a description of the unmistakable process of extermination of the nonhuman. Montañaño is clearly living her activism aloud, with no fear of telling things the way that they are, without frills, fancy metaphors, or complicated language. Thus, her lyrical style for this song forces an invasion into one's opaque and invented consciousness, pushing people to no longer dissociate themselves from the issues that make the overrepresentation of Man possible. Without a doubt, Montañaño's insistence on bringing up unpleasant topics in her songs, establishing Afro-Colombian rights to visibly invade the Colombian nation and discourse, as well as forcing images of violence, terror and trauma into the consciousness of the complicit could very well be a contributing factor to her inability to be picked up as a mainstream artist. One thing that this insistence also undoubtedly unveils is the incredible power implicit in simply telling and sharing stories.

In this chapter, I have explored two very different musical artists. One has shot to the pinnacle of international fame by incorporating, remixing, and in some instances, doing away with the quintessential traditional Afro-Colombian vernacular music and lyrics that helped to define her in the earlier stages of her career. The other, a budding solo artist who leaves no doubt that the one

main mission of her music is precisely to change humanity. While one may identify Montaña as the clear activist in this pairing, I argue that both musicians embody a unique form of activism that not only challenges the way people think, but ultimately (re)voices old worldviews, thus transforming them to accommodate universal notions of the human. ChocQuibTown, with Goyo as a central source of power for the group, pushes boundaries of the human by simultaneously affirming Afro-Colombianity and building a place for Blackness to be humanized. Similarly, while Montaña's music does espouse common traits of Afro-Colombian identity, most of her straightforward lyrics draw shocking attention to the injustices and violence not only faced by Afro-Colombians but by other subjugated sectors of society, and directly demands that we take responsibility and change our ways, or else. Either way, both vocalists and the other group members/musicians that back them are actively telling stories, weaving them into a web of transformation, a (re)doing and (un)doing that hopefully, sometime in the near future, will drive people to break the artificial categorical bonds that divide us in every possible way to become aware and stop the process of "making our own empirical human agency opaque to ourselves" ("Human Being as Noun" 47). In the next chapter, I will discuss how a similar process takes place with movies and film.

5.0 “Y Esto Quedó Pa’ La Historia”⁵⁶: (Re)Viewing the Space of Afro-Colombian Lives in Cinema

Freedom means the rejection of ‘white lies’ and the acceptance of the ‘black truth’ of his condition. Our condition is one of uprootedness. Our uprootedness is the original model of the total twentieth century disruption of man.

-Sylvia Wynter⁵⁷

Oiga señor presidente,
colóquese en mi lugar,
nos dice la Ley 70 que esta es nuestra propiedad,
si no hacemos resistencia
sin tierra nos vamos a quedar

-Oneida Orejuela⁵⁸

The Colombian film industry has historically refused to tell Black stories. This is not surprising, given the fact that the culture of cinema, on the one hand, is meant to reflect the best of a nation in the categories of beauty and talent, all the while revealing distinct social realities and conveying histories that help to define Colombia in the arts and cinematic world on an international stage. People may go to the movies because they want to be entertained and get lost in a story. Perhaps they are trying to find something to identify with or seek to be culturally relevant subjects who remain in the know on the nation’s most recent cinematic achievements. Aside from any number of reasons why we consume film, one thing is certain. Cinema legitimizes, validates, and visibilizes certain forms of storytelling and the subjects who tell them, thus acknowledging them

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Riaño Alcalá y Chaparro 95. This is part of a transcription of an *alabao* that the cantadores y cantadoras del Pogue sung to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the massacre. See the authors’ article for the complete composition.

⁵⁷ “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture” 24.

⁵⁸ Quiceno et al. 187. The *alabado* reads: “Listen Mr. President/put yourself in my place/ Law 70 tells us that this is our property/ If we do not resist/we will be without land.”

as subject matter worth producing for audiences. Therefore, if there are almost no Afro-Colombian stories told in film, that is a very direct indication that, at least for Colombian cinema, Blackness is an expendable narrative. As revealed in previous chapters, in the last ten to fifteen years, there has been an emergence of storylines that do highlight the life and struggles of Black populations from the Colombian Pacific in particular, signaling not only the desire to reflect diversity in film post-Law 70, but also, as Natalie Adorno indicates, a general resurgence of the Colombian film industry (111). However, despite international recognition and popularity at film festivals, this does not seem to change the status of Black stories as something other, foreign, and not fully part of the nation. Just as Law 70 itself connoted a mechanism of appeasement and false promises for Afro-Colombian citizens, the inclusion of supposedly diverse Afro-Colombian stories faces the same dilemma. Is the label of Afro-Colombian cinema just one more way to solidify an insider-outsider, only half-human identity? Does the action of telling Black stories in film only represent or perpetuate practices of appropriation and objectification of Afro-Colombian communities? What is at stake in telling these stories on film, and once on film and viewed by audiences, what do these narratives actually do? What is their role in making Blackness human? Is it enough just to see these films and expose these stories, no matter who tells them? I answer these questions using two films as examples. The first film, entitled *Chocó* (2012), deemed the first Black movie in Colombia, tells the story of a young wife and mother living in the region who must make tough decisions that compromise her body, her dignity, and her freedom just to buy her daughter a birthday cake as she suffers abuse and neglect from her husband and her community. The second film, a documentary entitled *Voces de resistencia* (2017) follows a group of *alabao* singers from the Bellavista, Bojayá region of Chocó who use song to denounce lived injustices and heal from the wounds of a massacre that occurred fifteen years earlier. I will explore—through Afro-

Colombian women’s creativity— how these visual narratives help to incite a (re)viewing of this geographical region that gives these Afro-Colombians, their descendants, and their ancestors ownership over not only the land they live on and cultivate, but also a very history that threatens to disappear altogether. The films themselves act as archives and project, suggest and yearn for a different time in which the ecumenically human exists, proving that the films themselves do not so much have the purpose or goal of catering to, emotionally reaching or connecting with audiences (although in the end, I believe they do). Rather, I suggest that each film strives to visualize a new human, one that still remains opaque to us. In this sense, the issue is that we have not yet cracked the code to visualize what these populations propose to actually be human. We have some catching up to do, a process that starts with, as the director of *Chocó* suggests, truly *seeing* the film.

5.1 “Un territorio que no existe”⁵⁹: Seeing Blackness on Film in Chocó

Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza, Afro-Colombian director and producer, has admitted in interviews that the idea for *Chocó* came from a conversation that he heard between two Afro-Colombian women as he and some of his colleagues were on a bus, heading from Quibdó to Istmina to do some research on a horror film he wrote and directed. Ironically, Hendrix admits that what was truly horrifying on that trip was the conversation between these two passengers. He overheard how both women talked about how they met their husbands, and as he listened, he realized it was a story of rape and patriarchal domination. However, both women perceived these

⁵⁹ Agenda CM & Chocó 03:17

violent actions from their partners as expressions of love towards them. They talked admirably about their husbands, and in the end, to Hendrix's surprise, he realized that both women had the same husband. For the director, the story of the way these women met their husband was truly disturbing because they were, in his mind, misconstruing and mistaking severe acts of domestic violence for affection. Nonetheless, for the women, violence was an everyday occurrence. From this interaction, Hendrix was reminded of just how normalized violence against women had become, not only in his native Quibdó, but throughout Colombia as well. He was inspired to start writing a script centered around this topic, not necessarily to denounce or condemn violence against women in Chocó, but to allow audiences to simply *see* another side of Colombian life (Entrevista con Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza, Parte 2 10:07-11:37). In a promotional interview, Hinestroza says that the main goal is to visibilize an "invisible territory." According to Hendrix, although Colombians know of the existence of the Chocó and the Colombian Pacific, if the territory is never seen in movies, on TV, or mentioned often in the news or in books, then essentially, it does not exist because it is not constantly visible to the public eye, and therefore is engineered to be forgotten (Agenda CM & Chocó 3:17-3:30). As a result, his main expectation for audiences when watching the movie is not even to enjoy or learn from it. Instead, he implores them to watch the story of a mom who gives up so much of herself to obtain what for many is a simple and accessible product: a birthday cake. From there, the possibilities—and the potential reactions to the film—are endless. I would like to take Hendrix's suggestion a bit further, delving into what the process of seeing or watching really entails here for outside and local audiences, as well as the actors and the director himself. Furthermore, I would like to expand seeing within the terms of what I conceive of as (re)viewing. As one of our five senses, we all know what seeing involves, but what about (re)viewing? Commenting on the process through which the cast and crew lived

while filming and the audience's reactions to the movie, I build on this term and explore just how this reviewing strives to locate the human.

For the director, cast, and crew, the road from script to screen was an arduous process, and a quite delicate one. Knowing that it would involve telling stories and living lives that were not their own, Hendrix's main task was to get to know the people and the region. To do this, he conducted workshops in the area, especially with women who were local housewives, to talk about domestic violence, accompanied by a psychologist. In interviews, he talks about how this process informed and changed the script from day to day. The director worked with a very loose and minimalistic script, only starting with a premise that a young Afro-Colombian girl was turning five years old. From there, he let the real "beautiful and painful" stories of women and men in the area shape the course of the movie ("Interview with Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza" 1:02-2:10). For example, the idea of the birthday cake came from the children who participated in the workshops and castings themselves. Upon asking the children auditioning to play Chocó's son and daughter what their favorite treat was, they all unanimously answered that it was cake ("Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza habla sobre 'Chocó'" 0:39-1:02). In addition, Hendrix demanded that the professional actors involved in the making of the movie "live" their characters for an extended period of time. While Karent Hinestroza, the actress who plays Chocó, learned how to pan for gold, washed laundry in the river and actually took care and cooked for the actors who would play her children, the actor who plays her on-screen husband, Esteban Copete, prepared by playing dominos, and going to local parties and get-togethers he was invited to, all while being offered plenty of shots of *viche* (1:30-2:14).⁶⁰ Finally, to get as natural of an effect as possible, the only professional actor

⁶⁰ *Viche* is a type of liquor original to the Pacific Colombian Coast and is usually homemade by members of the community and bottled for sale.

used in the film was Hinestroza herself. All other actors seen in the film were handpicked from the community to participate in filming. In order to further make the movie seem as realistic as possible, Hendrix has described how he wanted the film to appear as if it were a documentary. To do this, he established a pattern of filming in which only the protagonists of the scene had established lines and knew what was going to happen. Therefore, all others in the scene responded naturally to the dialogue or situation. At times, the director admits, the amateur actors had no idea they were being filmed (“Chocó al Cinema Beltrade” 5:56-8:37).

Although it is not rare for actors to get into character by immersing themselves in the environment or life of the person they are portraying, I argue that the efforts that Hendrix, Hinestroza, and the local Chocoans who participated in the film take here go beyond the desire to create the most authentic character possible. The procedures employed in making the film itself constitute a (re)viewing process that encompasses the complete embodiment of real-life stories and memories that act as an anchor which counters the deliberately imposed uprootedness of people of African descent in our current worldview. As Wynter poignantly affirms in the epigraph of this chapter, true freedom is the acknowledgment of the condition of uprootedness that allows for man to thrive in its present state. Hendrix, in publicly acknowledging the invisibility of the Pacific Coastal region, and of Afro-Colombians in general, reveals this uprootedness while also seeking to cinematically undo this state of unbelonging. Even though the movie itself will not lead to the transformation of Afro-Colombians into instant citizens, or convert them into worthy cinematic subjects, *Chocó* does provide a stable marker of visibility and a vantage point from which to capture and tell stories of Blackness, collecting them for a time in which they will be fully acknowledged, watched and respected as human experiences. Additionally, as Diana Taylor reminds us, performance is not just about embodiment, but about challenging the very notions of

embodiment itself (*The Archive* 4). Hendrix pushes back against everyday conceptualizations of Blackness and embodiment by revisioning Afro-Colombian subjects as actors, front-and-center and highly visible on the silver screen as they simultaneously occupy invented marginal or non-existent spaces. Going beyond the preparation, the movie itself juxtaposes reality with scenes of redemption and worldmaking with Karent Hinestroza as the vehicle through which Afro-Colombian women's stories are protected and humanized.

Chocó is the story of a young Afro-Colombian woman living in the department of the same name who is determined to buy a birthday cake for her daughter's birthday. She has a hard time making ends meet with her job as a gold panner and wash woman, and her husband Everlides, a jobless musician and alcoholic who spends his days gambling only to stagger home drunk and abuse his wife, is obviously of no help. The care and discipline of her young son and daughter and the maintenance of the household is completely up to her. Determined to buy her daughter the cake, Chocó attempts to barter with the local convenience store owner, Ramiro. As she cannot come up with the 25,000 Colombian pesos she needs to make the purchase all at once, she asks if she can pay in installments, and even offers to wash Ramiro's clothes free of charge. All she gets in return are refusals and a sexually suggestive offer: "usted parte esa torta, y me parto esta torta, Chocolatico,"⁶¹ implying the exchange of a sexual favor for the cake (00:33:20-00:33:27). Of course, Chocó immediately refuses and is determined to find another way to pay. She then goes home to make use of her last resort, money she has stashed away to pay for her children's schooling, only to realize that Everlides has taken it to go gambling. Upon angrily confronting him about the missing money in the middle of a game of dominoes, her husband's only response is to slap her across the face. When she falls to the ground, appearing to lose consciousness (or perhaps

⁶¹ "You cut that cake, and I cut *this* cake, Chocolatico."

remains on the ground due to pain and embarrassment) for several seconds, no one who has observed the very public incident comes to her aid, as the perpetrator nonchalantly returns to his game. Once Chocó gets up, she storms into the shop and defiantly agrees to have sex with Ramiro in order to bring the cake home to her daughter. In one of the final scenes, as Chocó's husband drunkenly staggers into the house, he demands oral sex from her. Chocó takes the opportunity to execute a plan of escape. She bites his penis, and while he is writhing in pain, Chocó, with blood still dripping from her mouth, takes the kids and runs, the house in flames from a lit candle that fell off of their home altar in the fray. The movie ends with a scene of a religious parade or procession, where a smiling and relaxed Chocó dances to music. Throughout the film, there are four moments that move between the harsh reality that Chocó experiences and periods of imagination, foreshadowing, daydreaming, and misplacement or juxtaposition of time that contribute to telling, sharing and archiving stories for the human to come.

The audience first meets Chocó at a funeral for one of the elders of the community. The camera pans over the congregants, which is followed by close ups of the men leading the funerary song as all sing to say farewell to the deceased and see her into the next life. The camera then moves in on Chocó's face as she turns her head to silently observe and listen to those singing. As the singing comes to an end, the scene abruptly switches to men outside a local store, loudly playing a game of dominoes and drinking. Among them is Chocó's husband, Everlides, who upon making too much of a drunken fuss, is promptly told to go home by Ramiro, the store owner. We see Everlides stumble home and get into bed where Chocó pretends to be asleep. He shakes Chocó awake, demanding that she have sex with him. Chocó doesn't want to and protests, saying that it will wake up the kids. However, this plea goes completely ignored, as Everlides slaps her hard across the cheek to subdue her, pins her down, and rapes her. During the rape scene, the camera

leads the viewer to fixate on a small home altar that is adorned with several lit candles, which violently shakes, seemingly disturbed by the rocking of the bed. One of the candles falls to the ground, igniting Chocó's small house in flames. The viewer then observes a shot of the house completely engulfed in fire, and only realizes that this has not really happened until the next scene, which cuts to Chocó awake and out of bed in the middle of the night as she goes outside to smoke a cigarette. As she smokes, a tear streams down her face and she seems both sad and contemplative. This first scenes introduce the setting and initial character dynamics of the movie to viewers while they also serve to incorporate an element of dreamlike space-time that may leave audiences somewhat disoriented or confused. At the end of the film, the viewer can clearly infer that the house burning down at the beginning of the movie functioned as a type of foreshadowing of what would happen towards the end. However, it is not clear exactly *how* this foreshadowing manifests. Was it something that Chocó dreamt, the memory or past of one of the many women who inspired the script, or simply the near future of a fictional character? One cannot really know for sure.

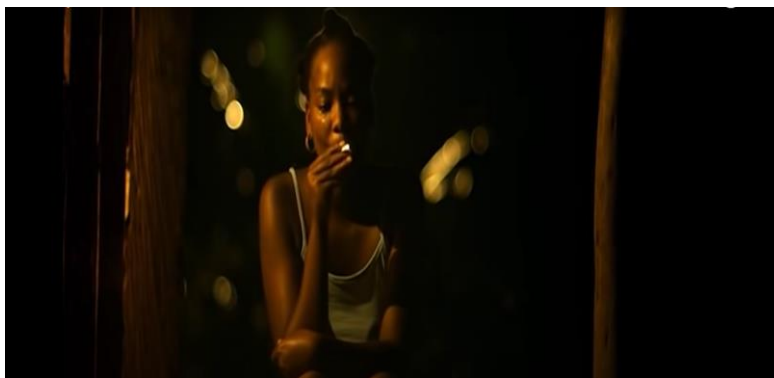


Figure 6. Chocó pictured in one of the first few scenes of the movie⁶²

Nonetheless, I argue that scenes like this suggest an opening or loophole in time and space, or rather, a reconfiguration of the future that displaces common expectations for the Afro-Colombian

⁶² Figures 6 and 7 are screenshots from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob0O21t76fE>.

woman, while at the same time evoking her power to claim the humanity that has been taken away from her. By even *daring* to imagine the scene of rebellion, the idea of her house in flames, Chocó is already actively dissociating herself from her aesthetically oppressed and opaque mindset. Furthermore, it is not just Chocó who this freedom and realization pertains to. As the director affirms, Chocó represents four sectors of society: the poor, the displaced, the Afro-Colombian population, and of course, women (“Chocó al Cinema Beltrade” 9:23-10:30). Hinestroza herself and her portrayal of Chocó represent in some form the true lived experiences of real Afro-Colombian women and their fervor to escape their conditions of subjugation. Therefore, by putting these memories or imaginings into a visual space in film, there is a process of both pushing-back-against, or undoing history while at the same time anchoring oneself in it as a human subject with agency, perhaps a re-doing of history, which is simultaneously an element of story-time.

This alternative imagination of life and time is interrupted, however, as Chocó heads to work and overhears a conversation between women who are hired to work in the mines along with her. While on the way to the mines, one of the women is having a conversation with her friend about a man named Ramón. She says that they happened upon each other at a creek and “me hizo suya hasta que las caderas me dolían y la boca me sabía feo.”⁶³ Another woman asks her if that’s what she really calls love, to which she responds that she does not know if it is love, but that Ramón sure knows how to make love, and for her to leave him, someone would have to kill her. Chocó then interjects and asks what else happened. The young woman responds aggressively and asks why she would like to know and if she knows Ramón. One of the other women joins the conversation and announces that Ramón’s real wife is present and points to a much older woman. Ramón’s lover then comments to his wife that he came home last night without his testicles and

⁶³ “He made me his until my hips hurt and I had a bad taste in my mouth.”

asks his wife what she did with them. She then responds with, “Your asking me? Ask him.” The young lover also informs the wife that Ramón said his wife cut off his penis and put it in a box because he did not make love to her the way she wanted to. The wife corrects her and responds that she did it so that her husband would stop messing around. The women on the truck continue to joke and laugh about the wife’s response (16:40-17:30). Although this may seem like a quite intense conversation to outsiders, Hendrix surely included this scene to reflect the everyday and normalized nature of abuse against women. Ramón’s wife does not even get mad upon discovering that her husband has been unfaithful to her, and in fact, it seems as if she has come to expect it. In a similar fashion, Ramón’s new lover does not identify her forced sexual encounters with Ramón as rape, and instead brags about how well he “makes love” to her. The only thing that angers Ramón’s lover is that other women lay claim to him. In the next scene, when they finally reach the mine and start working, the young woman is still clearly irritated by Chocó’s previous inquiry, and angrily demands to know how she knows Ramón, suspecting that she has also been involved with him. While Chocó denies knowing Ramón, a fight ensues between various workers as the young woman proclaims that Ramón is hers and only hers. Some of the women would beg to differ. Later that day, Chocó is fired from the mine and told not to come back due to her involvement in the fray. Not only is this moment in the movie likely a reenactment of the conversation on the bus between two women that served as Hendrix’s inspiration for the film itself, it also visibilizes the way in which, much like Wynter affirms, our own blindness, inability, and refusal to see the invented and changeable—yet seemingly inherent and natural—way of the world is what allows us to remain in a state of self-subjugation and prosthetic oppression. If these women’s ideas of success, attainment, respect and pleasure are linked to being abused by men, then it is not possible to envision a different way of life, not to mention a different mode of being. Even though Hendrix’s

goal in making the movie is simply to allow people to “see” another side of Colombian life, he is clearly making a commentary on the disturbing ways in which women blatantly accept abuse and fail to see their own worth as Afro-Colombian women, and beyond that, humans. The inability to see this manipulated state of consciousness is further evidenced by a contrasting image in the movie in which the women, still in the truck on the way to the mine, sing the lines of a popular Chocóan protest song: “Aunque mi amo me mata a la mina no voy/yo no quiero morir en un socavón (17:34-18:04).”⁶⁴ They do not realize that, although they are not actually enslaved, this subjugation continues in another form. On the other hand, despite this harsh illustration of reality, Hendrix’s interpretation of Chocó, who looks on disturbed and irritated as the other women laugh along with Ramón’s women, acts as the (re)viewing agent, a new angle and a catalyst for seeing the being of Afro-Colombian women differently. In addition to not finding any humor in the young lady’s story and subsequent joking, this is perhaps the moment in which Chocó finds inspiration for her plan of attack while the women joke about cutting off a man’s penis. Even if this line were just to be another instance of foreshadowing, it also represents that moment of thinking outside of conventional social hierarchies. If this part of a man’s anatomy is what he thinks gives him the power to mistreat women, making him the dominant sex, why not eliminate this physical representation of power? In this way, (re)viewing starts with an act of resistance against prosthetic oppression. However, it can blossom into much more when visually archived and preserved as an Afro-Colombian woman’s effort to become human.

Another notable part of the movie in which dream and reality combine is when Chocó, now working at another mine, finishes her workday and starts home. As she is walking, she encounters a young girl named Florencia. She follows Florencia to her secret place, and the young girl offers

⁶⁴ “Even if my owner kills me I am not going to the mine/ I do not want to die in a hole.”

it to Chocó to be her hideaway as well. When both of them sit down and have a chat, the girl, barefoot, shows Chocó that she has six toes on one foot, a defect that her mother tells her is from the toxic mercury in the mines, where Florencia's mother was forced to work while pregnant in order to make money because the girl's father abandoned them. All of a sudden, Chocó lifts her head from its bowed position, as if waking from sleep or a daydream to find herself alone, with no trace of the girl and with tears streaming down her face (56:48-58:06). I argue that this is yet another scene in which real Afro-Colombian women's stories play a main role. These memories of loss and mourning have come to be embodied and (re)viewed through the mind of Chocó, who—as she remembers and imagines—clearly but silently mourns for the abandoned girl and mother herself. This also further creates a sense that what Chocó is about to do and the quiet planning of her escape is not just for her. It is also for the many who came before her and continue to suffer, and who want to—but cannot—find a way out.



Figure 7. Chocó and Florencia

Finally, the last scenes of the movie—in which Chocó escapes with her kids and we are reintroduced to the image of the burning house seen at the beginning of the movie—brings the narrative full circle. Although there is no clear indication of where she will go, or what she will do next, one can only hope that she is headed towards a better life. If the very last scene is any

indication, a depiction of a local religious celebration where Chocó herself (or perhaps Hinestroza as herself?) dances to the music and looks refreshed and relaxed, adorned with a blue dress and her hair done into long braids, then it is assumed that she has at least gained some autonomy, peace, and respect, or perhaps this is what she imagines her life to be in another time. The parade scene is cut between the end credits of the film, in which Hendrix puts a dedication which reads “A mi madre, a mi padre, y a mi hijo por enseñarme que ser negro es un milagro (01:16:14).”⁶⁵ How might we conceive of this ending, and the previously discussed scenes, as proposing new versions of the human and going beyond the act of preserving memory? I would argue that the key to reading Chocó as an important tool to incorporate Blackness into the human has to do with the way it reflects the (re)viewing process, which consists of three components: seeing, feeling, and embodying.

The actions that make up (re)viewing may seem painfully simple, but in our current genre of the human, they are much harder to do than one would think. In fact, allowing ourselves to embark on the (re)viewing process would go against the very developed instincts we have been trained to acquire with this particular conception of Man. First, seeing, or “to perceive by the eye,” goes beyond the basic function of one of our five senses. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to see is also “to imagine as a possibility,” “to form a mental picture of,” or “to see the meaning or importance of” (www.merriam-webster.com). The latter definitions are more along the lines of what I invoke when I speak of seeing. Therefore, this first step not only involves simply seeing or looking at what is on screen, but also allowing oneself to imagine, internalize, and ultimately gain consciousness and become aware of the situation in question. The second phase of (re)viewing is feeling—or beyond developing a critical stance—allowing oneself to react

⁶⁵ “To my mother, my father, and my son for teaching me that being Black is a miracle.”

emotionally to what one is seeing, whether it is positive or negative. This may take place even before or after coming into a renewed consciousness through seeing. Finally, the third phase consists of embodying, or bearing, and then transferring the weight and value of these Afro-Colombian women's stories on oneself, carrying them beyond the silver screen and the space of the theater. According to Hendrix himself, those that watch the film seem to experience all, or at least some parts of this process. In one interview, he affirms that, at the end of screenings, women would often express their love for the movie and tell him that they enjoyed it because they see themselves represented on screen. However, he has noticed that men have often had a negative or somewhat reserved reaction to the film. At least, Hendrix confesses, no man has ever come up to him at the end of a screening to talk about or praise the film as women do ("Interview with Jhonny Hendrix" 2:14-2:58). Perhaps, this could be due to the self-recognition of the men's complicity or active role in portraying the abusive machismo represented by the character of Everlides. While the film may have engendered a pang of consciousness and guilt, this perhaps is a feeling that these men are not ready to face yet. Still, other reactions reveal that Hendrix succeeds in going beyond labels of race, gender, and place to share a human experience. For example, during a film festival screening in Berlin, Hendrix remembers that "se acercó una rusa para agradecerme por haber contado su historia. Como esa era la primera proyección ante un público extranjero, me di cuenta que había logrado mi objetivo: contar una historia universal" (qtd. in Contreras).⁶⁶ In telling a universal story, the director invites all to (re)view with him, regardless of where they come from or how similar or different the circumstances. Hendrix also succeeds in humanizing and decategorizing Blackness and feminism, again reaffirming that there is no "race" or "woman"

⁶⁶ "A Russian woman came up to me to thank me for having told her story. As that was the first showing before a foreign audience, I realized that I had achieved my objective: to tell a universal story."

issue, but only a human one. In this current worldview, one may be inclined to criticize a male director for telling or appropriating a Black woman's story. However, I contend that it is this very type of thinking that keeps us "opaque" to ourselves, unable to get to the ecumenically human, constantly trapped under mechanisms of prosthetic oppression. Instead, Hendrix's movie-making efforts position him as an ally and advocate to not only fight subjugation and violence against women, but to help bring them into the fold of the human. It is no surprise then, that Hendrix professes that being Black is a miracle. It allows one to tap into the future of the human that not everyone can envision yet, and places Black non-subjects, unimportant and disposable in this realm of being, at the vanguard of freedom and humanity. Similarly, the documentary *Voces de resistencia* is a small but potent film project that seeks to invoke a sense of place and healing, as well as to awaken sleeping consciences in this life and the next.

5.2 Exposing the Human Through Healing and Memory in *Voces de Resistencia*

Voces de Resistencia is a project carried out by el Centro de Estudios Afrodiaspóricos at La Universidad ICESI in Cali, Colombia in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and el Centro de Ética y Democracia. This audiovisual endeavor is meant to highlight, disseminate, and preserve the unique work that the Cantadores y Cantadoras de Pogué do by composing and singing *alabaos* to protest the ominous presence of paramilitaries and the violence and death they bring. *Voces de Resistencia* is an ongoing project which, so far, has produced one short documentary and a CD of recorded *alabaos*. This group of *alabadores* from the Bellavista-Bojayá region of Chocó have garnered much media attention since May 2, 2002, the day in which a pipe bomb was thrown into the old church of Bellavista, where many sought refuge as members of the FARC Guerilla group

and a sector of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, a paramilitary and drug trafficking group, partook in combat. Although reports vary, it is estimated that around 79 people were killed, of which more than half were children. Many more were injured and eventually died from their injuries. When it seemed that the conflict was over, the survivors crossed the rivers, waving white handkerchiefs as a sign of surrender to seek help in the neighboring town of Vigia Del Fuerte (Quiceno et al. 177). It was an event that once again put the Chocó region into the national and international headlines, a place it rarely occupies unless tragedy strikes, serving as a strong reminder of the absolute neglect that the region faces at the hands of the State. Despite repeatedly asking for State protection from guerilla and paramilitary conflicts beforehand, the government refused to step in and help until the worst thing imaginable happened, only doing so to rectify an international image that had been damaged by the showing of such negligence. Worse still for the members of the Bojayá-Bellavista community was the inability to properly bury and see those who passed away into the next life. Due to the imminent threat of ongoing violence, people quickly buried their dead in a mass grave and were forced to relocate to Quibdó, leaving behind their loved ones without being able to say goodbye, which must be done through the singing of *alabaos*.

The makers of the *Voces de Resistencia* project define *alabaos* as a “canto de intercesión ante Dios y los santos por el alma de los que fallecen (Voces de Resistencia).”⁶⁷ More specifically, one *alabadora* explains.

‘el canto es una rogativa que le hacen al muerto’. Esta rogativa es la que permitirá que su alma-fuerza vital ejecute sus últimos pasos en vida, se aleje del cuerpo y pueda pasar al otro lado. Por eso los *alabaos* no se cantan a cualquier hora, sino cuando hay un difunto en la comunidad y en tres momentos: 1) la noche de la velación, 2) durante su sepelio y 3) en

⁶⁷ “song of intercession between God and the saints for the soul of the deceased.”

‘la última’ de las nueve noches que le siguen a la velación y durante las cuales se han celebrado otros rezos y oraciones que marcan, tanto para el alma del difunto como para la comunidad, esa transición de la vida a la muerte. Un cuarto momento para la interpretación de *alabaos* es la noche del Viernes Santo.⁶⁸ (Riano-Alcalá and Chaparro 87)

Beyond coaxing the dead into the next life, *alabaos* also serve to comfort the living, giving them strength to face the pain that comes with losing someone, providing an ample range of expression to channel anger, fear, tears, loneliness and many other feelings and emotions. After the Bojayá-Bellavista massacre, the *alabadoras* decided to pen their own *alabaos*, this time writing and composing to commemorate the events of that day, express pain, anger and hurt, and make demands for peace and a stop to the violence. Since then, the *alabadoras* have received a fair amount of publicity, being featured on the news, performing at events and commemorations of the massacre for government officials, and being the subject of various academic works. Scholars specifically are intrigued by this creative mode of protest, and often classify the work of creating and performing *alabaos* as representing an alternative politics, a sonic reconstruction or preservation of memory, or even an invoking of African roots. However, not many have discussed the utility or function of *alabaos* outside of the context of the massacre and the politics surrounding it. If these *alabaos* truly represent a transmission of the pain, indignation, and sense of injustice felt by the victims of the Bojayá massacre, directed at the president himself, one must question why these pleas continue to fall on deaf ears. Why don't government officials receive—or at least

⁶⁸ ‘the song is a prayer that they make to the dead person.’ This prayer is what will allow your soul-life force to execute its last steps in life, to move away from the body and to pass to the other side. That is why the praises are not sung at just any time, but when there is a deceased person in the community and at three specific times: 1) the night of the vigil, 2) during the burial and 3) on "the last" of the nine nights that follow the vigil and during which time other prayers have been celebrated that mark, both for the soul of the deceased and for the community, that transition from life to death. A fourth time for the interpretation of *alabaos* is the night of Good Friday.

fail to drive into action—this transference of emotion? I argue that it is something that we are unable to fully receive in this worldview, because in part, it is not for us to understand quite yet. The *alabaos* and their recordings do not represent a looking-back so much as they do a pushing-back-against official discourses of history, constructing a looking glass into the future and into the stories that will reshape the human. In this sense, *Voces de Resistencia* becomes an important and special project. As a documentary, it allows the *alabadoras* to perform and to be, letting the spectator partake in the process of (re)viewing. With its simple and understated style, the documentary itself does not criticize or rail against the government for its unjust behavior, nor does it create a victim narrative. Rather, its focus is solely on the women and their choice to heal with creativity, visually placing them firmly and very visibly in their territory while also refusing to limit the capacity and strength of their songs in the process of slowly changing humanity.

The first volume of *Voces de Resistencia* introduces the viewer to the *Cantadoras del Pogue*, where they live, and why it is that they sing. Only 25 minutes long, the documentary includes various performances by the group of *alabadoras*, dressed in special costumes made specifically for the purpose of the documentary. Although the story of the *alabadoras* de Pogue has been told many times and in different ways, *Voces de Resistencia* differs from other projects on this group of singers in the sense that it does not rely extensively on external sources to give background or context to the situation, such as showing relevant news segments or television reports from the time of the attack in order to inform the viewer of the highly political and contentious circumstances in which the massacre took place. Rather, in the first minute and a half of the film, brief and basic information is provided on the purpose of the documentary, the importance of *alabaos*, the geographical region, the cause of the massacre and the number of victims. Beyond that, all other details and information are transferred to audience members by the

lyrics of the *alabaos*, along with a couple of short interviews from some of the *alabadores*. In this way, the filmmakers let the art of the *alabao* and the ravaged territory itself take center stage, allowing them to speak to the viewer, with sweeping aerial views of the small town of Pogue, the municipality of Bojayá, and its old and new municipal centers, Bellavista Viejo, the original territory, and Bellavista Nuevo, designated as the new center of town after the massacre. With each new visual introduction to these territories, information is shown on the screen about that region, such as its longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates, the size of the population, the year it was founded, and the economic activities carried out there. This is usually followed by scenes of the *alabadores de Pogue* singing within these spaces. The aerial and performance scenes are also intercut with shots of the old, abandoned buildings in Bellavista Viejo. The old school, police station, and the old church of San Pablo Apóstol, where the massacre took place, seem to be the only signs that human lives once moved through these spaces. The old church, clearly damaged from the explosion, acts a site of remembrance, featuring pictures of community members and victims of the blast, and a huge poster hung on one of the church walls which reads, “Nuestras Víctimas, 2 de mayo 2002, Bellavista-Bojaya-Choco [sic].”⁶⁹ These quiet scenes are accompanied by nothing but the sound of chirping birds and the surrounding sounds of nature, establishing a contemplative and mournful atmosphere. These scenes of abandonment and loss are filled with the presence and song of the *alabadores* who demand government leaders and paramilitaries: “Respeten nuestros derechos/no los vengán a violar”⁷⁰ as they ride down the Atrato river or sing of their hopes and dreams in front of the old church, professing “Queremos justicia y paz que

⁶⁹ “Our Victims, May 2, 2002, Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó.”

⁷⁰ “Respect our rights/Don’t violate them.”

venga de corazón pa' que llegue a nuestros campos salud, paz y educación.”⁷¹ It is impossible to ignore the strong inflections in their voices as they sing, as well as their body language of pointing diligently towards the camera, hugging themselves to invoke pain and protection. I argue that the visual nature of the documentary simultaneously acts as a reclamation of territory, placing its members once again in the very place they were torn from as it also creates a sense of openness for the *alabao* itself to do what it will, and transfer the pain, emotion, and knowledge to those who are willing to see and feel it.



Figure 8. An aerial view of the Chocó region⁷²



Figure 9. The alabadoras del Pogué sing on the Atrato River

⁷¹ “We want justice and peace that comes from the heart so that health, peace and education come to our territories”

⁷² Images are screenshots taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pKUJYzaWcQ&t=376s>.



Figure 10. A poster hung in commemoration of the massacre victims in Bellavista Viejo

While this transfer will surely not reach many in this current worldview, the documentary itself acts as an assertion of humanness and staking a claim on the basic rights that all living beings should be entitled to. Therefore, *Voces de Resistencia* is a simple but unique push toward the human as the *alabadoras* sing not just for themselves, but for those that came before them, those they will see again, those that perhaps haven't left altogether yet, and of course, those not here yet. The fact that the documentary adds a visual element to the voices of the *cantadores* and *cantadoras* is key to (re)imaging spaces meant for decimation and destruction into possibilities and stories of freedom. If one allows it, then the process of (re)viewing is a look past the labels of Afro-Colombian, *alabadora*, and *chocoano*, and all of its negative connotations, to reveal a peek at how we—and more specifically these women—can transform views on humanity.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how it is possible to visualize the human through film. Johnny Hendrix's goal of letting people *see* a different side of Colombia through Chocó is both a powerful and simple proposal that prompts us to stop, absorb, and contemplate the nonhuman, challenging us to relate to the characters on the deepest human level of emotion and lived experience. I extend this notion to conceive of a concept of (re)viewing, which involves processes of seeing, embodying and feeling to go beyond just relating or connecting with these real stories to convert this connection into a humanizing tool that folds Blackness into the anatomy

of the human. The short documentary *Voces de Resistencia* also follows suit by creating an open space for the expression and transference of the performances of *alabaos* in a territory that Afro-Colombians refuse to abandon and vehemently claim as theirs. It again proposes the useful tactic of seeing and observing to absorb how Afro-Colombians transmit their pain, joy and demands for justice, which—although not heeded by government officials—are resonating with those few who will themselves to break through the (un)authenticity and opaqueness of this invented reality and will continue to speak to those in different realms and times, even the ones we cannot quite conceive of yet. In the next chapter, I will discuss how Afro-Colombian female authors free humanity through writing.

6.0 (Re)Inscribing Geographies and Challenging Time with Love in Afro-Colombian Women's Writings

He sought for words to tell them of the world that he had entered where there were no far places and no strangers. Only men, like themselves, who would one day inhabit together the same new continents of the spirit, the same planets of the imagination.

-Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*⁷³

...nothing about diaspora is easy to create, to define, to fix...

-Samantha Pinto, *Difficult Diasporas*⁷⁴

In 1995, Afro-Colombian writer and scholar Úrsula Mena Lozano publishes an 86-page study on the history of Black Chocoan poetry and its authors, highlighting the names, stories, efforts, and artistry of those that fell through the literary cracks of Colombian poetic narrative from colonial times until the 1990s. In 2002, San Andres Island native, writer, and columnist Hazel Robinson Abrahams' fictional historical novel, *No Give Up Maan ¡No te rindas!* is published, and in 2010, is included in an unprecedented collection of literary works meant to celebrate the contributions of Afro-Colombian writers entitled *La biblioteca de literatura afrocolombiana*. The collection, released in 2010, contains 18 books and one essay. Robinson's book is the only novel written by a woman, and the only standalone literary work to be written by an author from the Colombian territory of the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia, and Santa Catalina. While Mena features examples of popular *alabaos* and several poems written by the likes of Manuel Sarturio Valencia, Miguel A. Caicedo, Hugo Salazar Valdés, Rogerio Velázquez and Teresa

⁷³ p. 173

⁷⁴ p. xvii

Martínez de Varela, Robinson tells a nineteenth century love story between George, a mixed raced man—the son of a slave and a white ship captain—and Elizabeth, a young woman from the Spanish colony of Newquay in England. They both fall in love after George rescues Elizabeth from a shipwreck. The novel follows their fight to stay together in a world where interracial relationships were thought humanly impossible, just as the archipelago is declared official Colombian territory and slavery is abolished on the island. Although these works of literature may initially seem very distinct in content and genre, the one theme that draws them together is using love as the overarching influence, purpose and mechanism through which unity, artistry, and—I argue—a new sense of the human—envision itself. As I will demonstrate, what is more important than the actual subject matter of Mena’s poetic anthology and Robinson’s novel is the effect that their writing creates as it becomes theorized around the expression of love. I argue that this effect consists of an active elaboration of intra-time within conspiratorial time, which lends itself to the yet-to-exist realm of story-time.⁷⁵ In other words, these works of female Black storytelling rewrite the historical past in our present realm of being, thinking, and knowing to form the foundation of a world and time in which the ecumenically human can exist. Furthermore, these Afro-Colombian writers reveal how the task of (re)inscribing history goes beyond the simple process of reimagining, adding, or eliminating surface details. On the contrary, real change entails a more in-depth approach that must take up Wynter’s task of a total reinvention of worldviews, not just a mere shuffling of details. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how both Robinson and Mena succeed in blurring the lines of geographies, diasporas and the world as we know it by (re)inscribing through love, starting with a word on the significance of geographies and diasporas in this context.

⁷⁵ For a refresher on my concept of conspiratorial time, intra-time, and story-time, please see section 3.2 of this dissertation.

6.1 Geographies, Diasporas and Forging Continents of the Spirit in Raizal Literature

African Diaspora scholar Samantha Pinto defines her concept of difficult diasporas as “the aesthetic and critical terrains that imagine the feminist Diaspora becomes not only a set of physical movements, then, but also a set of aesthetic and interpretive strategies” (xii-xiv). Indeed, the physical migrations that constitute diaspora can be made to appear traceable and easily translatable in the official histories of our current realm of being. However, as Pinto demonstrates in her book, *Difficult Diasporas*, the making of global Black histories is not just about archival evidence, census records, and detected and recorded journeys. Diaspora itself should also be seen as a set of strategies through which past, present, and future make themselves known and identities become (re)interpreted. Although diaspora-as-strategy is not a physically detectable territory, it is nonetheless an uncharted terrain that, as Pinto points out, is uncomfortably difficult to navigate and make sense of because at many points in the interpretation process, there will be no clear answers. However, this indecipherability may just be the key. Rather than duplicating scholarly efforts to fully imagine a post-Man, post-racial or post-Black world, Pinto urges us instead to “revel in this difficult process, with the possibility of “making representation less of a burden and more of a collective pleasure and responsibility” (xviii). I argue that this also has the effect of being able to challenge borders and boundaries that have traditionally directed our definition of the Afro-Colombian, which in turn shields our capability to go beyond our current state of humanness. For example, one may not consider that a part of Afro-Colombian identity can be traced not just to the mainland, but to Colombia’s other territories, such as the Archipelago of San Andres, Providence and Catalina.

The Archipelago of San Andres and Providencia officially became a Colombian territory in 1822. However, due to its varied cultural history, influenced by various imperial powers during colonial times, it is not at all like traditionally colonized Latin American territories. The islands were first populated by Dutch merchants and British Puritans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Sommer 82). As Ranocchiari and Calabresi also assert:

Geographically, the archipelago is much closer to Nicaragua and Jamaica than Colombia's Caribbean coast, a location that has generated profound historical ties between Central American and Antillean populations. In fact, the Archipelago's Raizal population only recently began to consider themselves ethnically different from Afro-Anglo-Caribbeans of the Central American Miskito Coast—with the latter groups they speak a Creole English that is very similar to the Jamaican Patois. (481)

During the late twentieth century, in conjunction with Law 70 and the declaration of Colombia as a multicultural and pluriethnic nation, the Raizal population, or those native to the archipelago, also started to play the game of identity politics more strongly, asserting certain cultural and territorial rights, and pushing back against the Colombianization of the islands. In fact, many in the Raizal population do not consider themselves Colombian or Afro-Colombian and strongly identify with the Anglo-Puritan roots of the Archipelago's history. This archipelago's distinctive origins have caused much cultural tension between Colombia and its territory and have given rise to the establishment of various separatist organizations throughout the eighties onward to defend Raizal culture and political autonomy (2).⁷⁶ This short historical overview is in no way meant to

⁷⁶ According to Ranocchiari and Calabresi, In the 1960s, Marco Polo Archbold Britton wrote a letter to the Vice President of the United States at the time to request support to create a new mini state in the Caribbean. Of course, this request was denied, but later, Britton would go on to establish the *Comité pro-independencia de San Andrés* (Pro-Independence Committee of San Andrés). Similar separatist movements were established in the 1970s and 80s, including the Islander Civic Movement and Sons of the Soil (SOS). Towards the end of the 1990s, the Archipelago

be exhaustive. It can already be deciphered that just as Afro-Colombian culture has been hidden and largely ignored, the history of this unique archipelago has gone substantially unnoticed in mainstream cultural and literary circles. That is not to say that the territory has not had its share of artistic production, which includes the likes of Hazel Robinson Abrahams.

Despite being one of the most prolific storytellers of the history and life of the Archipelago of San Andres and Providencia, Robinson herself has led a quiet existence. In addition to her historical fiction works, she is best known for her weekly articles about the archipelago, published in the Sunday edition of the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* from 1959 to 1960. Robinson's column spanned 30 editions and addressed issues, curiosities, and historical happenings of the archipelago, opening a small cultural window into the distinct story of the author's birthplace. It was not until 2002, however, that Robinson published her very first novel *No Give Up, Maan! ¡No te rindas!*. The novel, written in both English and Spanish, has been examined as a foundational fiction for its classic storyline of two lovers who must battle various obstacles to consolidate their love, representing the unification of a national identity. Doris Sommer herself identifies key points in Robinson's novel that solidify this literary style, and also hints that her work may have been directly inspired by certain 18th and 19th century European and Latin American novels:

The book's Englishborn heroine, orphaned after a shipwreck washes up on the island's shore and falls in love with her mixed-race savior, whom she marries by the happy ending when the Colombians arrive. This plot may have been inspired by *Paul et Virginie* (1788), a much-imitated French love story about a well-born girl and an illegitimate boy who grow

Movement for Ethnic Native Self-Determination or AMEN-SD was formed by Baptist and Catholic religious leaders on the island. This group led to a demonstration in 2007 that ended with the lowering of the Colombian flag and raising the AMEN-SD flag. The event was largely considered to signify the end of AMEN-SD as the leader and unifier under which other separatist movements of San Andres and Providencia operated, although it continued to remain active as it's very own organization (488-490).

up together on the island of Mauritius, but which ends tragically when a shipwreck blocks her return. As Robinson perhaps did, Anglo and Latin Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rewrote European novels, turning old world tragedies into new beginnings. The resulting romantic novels reflected the optimism of expansion by non-Europeans, suddenly free to stalk new world opportunities and realize their frustrated desires. Or maybe Robinson was sampling from older Latin American novels which had themselves imitated *Paul et Virginie*, such as Ecuador's *Cumandá* (1877), which lifts whole sentimental scenes from the French island classic. (83)

Although Sommer could very well have been right about Robinson's inspiration behind the novel, there is no concrete evidence that the work mentioned above actually influenced the plot of *No Give Up, Maan!*. However, one thing that remains certain in all of Robinson's publications⁷⁷ is that she wishes to send a message about the archipelago to the readers of the world. Clearly, Robinson's mission is to narrate the history of the islands and their complicated past, as well as generate reflection about how this living history continues to affect the lives of Raizal populations today, which has largely gone ignored in mainstream media. Specifically, in *No Give Up, Maan!*, Robinson dedicates the book to "todos los que en una época llegaron contra su voluntad a estas islas y se fueron sin la oportunidad de contar su historia" (Robinson 33).⁷⁸ Writing about a time in which slavery still existed and was officially abolished may lead scholars like Sommer to conclude that love triumphs over all and that the enslaved do get their "happy ending." However, as we will soon see, Robinson expresses through her characters not a sense of happiness upon being free, but

⁷⁷ In addition to *No Give Up, Maan!* Robinson has published two more historical fiction novels about the archipelago entitled *Sail Ahoy* (2004) and *El príncipe de St. Katherine* (2009) (Robinson 18).

⁷⁸ "To everyone who, in a time period, arrived against their will to these islands and left without the opportunity to tell their story."

a feeling of enormous uncertainty and fear, with both the enslavers and the enslaved having no idea how life as a free Black subject is going to look. In the world of Robinson's novel, this type of human has never existed before. How does one know what freedom looks like when it has never existed before? Robinson uses the mixed-race George, who occupies some nowhere space between enslaved and free, to reflect on what freedom might mean for the enslaved when he expresses to Pastor Birmingham that "Pienso mucho en la condición en que se enfrentarán a esa libertad, pa' Joe. Despojos humanos, sin fortaleza para luchar, en un mundo que seguirá despreciándolos, esclavizados después a costumbres ajenas, sin orgullo de sí mismos y de su raza y sus tradiciones" (168).⁷⁹ These very informed, almost futuristic statements are scattered throughout the novel, casting a grim, but hugely realistic light onto what this moment must have meant for the enslaved. Fittingly, this feeling of unbelonging and cultural imposition also resonate with a sentiment that many Raizal people feel today about their distinct island roots and the Colombian State's dismissal of their unique beginnings upon becoming part of Colombian territory. I argue that commentary and denouncements like this are the true heart of Robinson's novel. While the author uses certain characters to demonstrate the differently held views on the alleged nonhumanness and inferiority of enslaved people during colonial times, she also counters that with deep and insightful commentaries by George and Elizabeth, the two main characters and lovebirds in *No Give Up, Maan!*. Their individual observations create a theoretical criticism on the state of Blackness, being and humanness that greatly advances beyond discourses on race and the human in colonial times. Furthermore, I contend that the theme of love as a healing tool of unification extends beyond Robinson's desire to want to imitate the style of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels, but

⁷⁹ "I worry a lot about how they'll cope with that freedom, pa' Joe. They're just human remains with no strength to fight, in a world that will continue to look down on them. Slaves to customs that are not their own, with no pride in themselves, their race, or their traditions" (Robinson 369).

instead proposes a vehicle for new worldmaking that sets emotions, feelings, sensations, and experiences at the forefront of historical interpretation and future endeavors to expand our current worldview.

6.2 (Re)Inscribing History in Different Times: Love as Humanizing Transformation

Both Robinson and Mena perform the phenomenon of intra-time perfectly, but looking at Robinson's 2002 novel, especially as a prime example of how the past can never be perceived as complete or accurate, as well as how its narrative always changes and evolves as much as the present and the future, it is easy to see how the addition of stories, viewpoints, and perspectives can be intertwined to change history as we know it. After all, as Robinson herself affirms "lo sugestivo es la leyenda, lo que la imaginación pudo crear y de tanto repetirlo parece verdadero" (qtd. in Robinson 15).⁸⁰ In this sense, Robinson creates a distinct form of imagining around her two main characters, George and Elizabeth. George is the only prominent mixed-race character in the novel, and is of course, considered an outsider, both by white and Black islanders. His status as a *ñanduboy*⁸¹ means that he is not a part of any previously existing cultural or social group on the archipelago. Although there are other slaves who have been labeled as *Ñandu*, the products of the rape of enslaved women by their white slave masters, George is the only one who had access to education and was not required to work in the fields, having been raised and educated by

⁸⁰ "What is suggestive is legend, what is created by the imagination and repeated often enough, seems to be real" (qtd. in Robinson 225).

⁸¹ In the novel, George explains that the meaning of *Ñandu* is a word that the enslaved "learned from the Indians on the Talamanca coast. It is a red hard wood, and an Americanized African (356)." Robison also describes being *Ñandu* as being "a man without a tribe" and "neither black or white" and later comments that "For those who came into the world as George had, there was no past" (288).

Reverend Birnington—the religious leader on the island who attempts to “civilize” the enslaved through Christianity—since the age of 10. His mom, known as *La muda*, or the silent one, due to her self-imposed vow of silence since her journey through the Middle Passage, begged the father of her child, a cook on the vessel on which she was transported, to provide him with what she could not and to ensure that he would not work in the fields. Although the details of what happens next are not specifically explained in the novel, this plea leads the captain of the ship and one of the archipelago’s plantation owners, Richard Bennet, to believe that, after a night of drunken stupor, he is in fact George’s biological father. Bennet never publicly recognizes George as his son, although their biological relationship is suspected amongst slaves and fellow plantation owners. It is not until the end of the novel that George reveals the truth, but until then, out of a sense of guilt, Bennett always provided George with privileges and resources that others of his origins never had. Elizabeth Mayson, on the other hand, could not be from a more different world. Elizabeth is travelling with her parents from the Spanish colony of Newquay in Cornwall, England to start a new life in New Orleans when their ship is turned away due to missing passengers. The captain then attempts to stop on the island of Jamaica but gets trapped in one of the worst hurricanes experienced in the archipelago’s history, causing a shipwreck that kills all 107 passengers except for Elizabeth. George eventually finds her within the ruins of the ship the same night of the wreck after there were thought to have been no survivors. George carries her to safety where enslaved women nurse her back to health, and after ten days she finally wakes up, able to stand, speak, and start to come to terms with the tragedy. While convalescing, Elizabeth gets the nickname *la niña ángel* (the angel child) as she reminds one of the enslaved women of the cherubim seen in Biblical paintings, with her blond hair, pale skin, and blue eyes. At just twenty years old, Elizabeth loses her only family and finds herself in a completely new place, where she

must find a way to either leave the archipelago or restart her life there. Robinson succeeds in using this backstory to portray Elizabeth as very innocent and naïve. Throughout the novel, she displays no bias, discrimination, or racism towards the enslaved, and instead expresses interest in the island's Afro-centric customs and ways of life. It is clear that she is aware of—yet detests—systems of colonial slavery, and overall, seems empty of pre-conceived notions of Blackness as a representation of the inferior. It is of course, through George, her rescuer, that she learns more about the archipelago and eventually falls in love. Robinson's characterization of Elizabeth almost seems too good to be true even for fiction. Having had an English father and Spanish mother with ties to aristocracy and empire, how could Elizabeth not have been marred by the socioracial and political teachings of the time? I argue that Elizabeth's innocence, along with George's unique access to both Black and white worlds, gives Robinson the ability to forge future notions of humanness through these two characters.

There are three conversations in particular that showcase this future worldmaking that I will elaborate on here. The first is actually a chain of conversation between George, Elizabeth, and Reverend Birnington the same night that a yearly ritual takes place amongst the enslaved. Frustrated and upset, Elizabeth tells George about her previous conversation with Reverend Birnington in which he attempts to explain to her how vehemently corrupt these celebrations are, calling them a satanic “orgy of niggers” (352). In response to this:

Elizabeth repetía las palabras de Birnington: ‘Esclavos ingratos, pecadores, salvajes...’.

Cuánto desprecio y sólo porque no han logrado erradicar de sus vidas su pasado, sus costumbres. No quiere aceptar que tienen derecho a sus creencias, sus mitos, sus leyendas.

Qué falta de caridad, me confunde su doble personalidad, cuánta crueldad, ¡Dios mío! No reconoce que lo que ellos hacen esta noche debe ser su forma de convencerse de que no

son esclavos. Lo serían sin remedio si adoptaran las costumbres que son contrarias a su naturaleza, dictadas por una sociedad que desconoce y desprecia su cultura, de criterio estrecho, y la incapacidad de aceptar diferencias. (150-151)⁸²

Later that night, still perturbed by Reverend Birnington's words, Elizabeth asks George why the reverend reacted so negatively to the customs of the enslaved, to which George responds:

Él piensa que su misión es reemplazar esas costumbres ancestrales con su cultura, su creencia, sus métodos; y ellos a pesar de la vida en esclavitud son obstinados y reacios a las innovaciones en sus vidas. Utilizan estos encuentros, y también el idioma en una silenciosa batalla para demostrarlo. Elizabeth, el reverendo Birnington no quiere reconocer que es un mito eso del esclavo feliz que acepta el cristianismo. Atrofiar la personalidad del negro es la meta, y al paso que van, lo lograrán a la vuelta de pocas generaciones. Con la esclavitud del trabajo, obligados a sobrevivir, aceptar una cultura y costumbres que chocan con su carácter, más el desprecio imperdonable de todo lo que son y representan, el negarles hasta el primitivo derecho de la institución familiar. Todo eso, Elizabeth, los convertirá en seres que no tendrán más que un sentimiento degradante de sí mismos.⁸³

⁸² Elizabeth repeated Birnington's words. 'Ungrateful slaves, sinners, savages...' So much scorn just because they haven't been able to forsake their customs. He just doesn't want to accept that they have a right to their beliefs, their legends, and their traditions. What a lack of charity he shows! I can't believe he is so two-faced and cruel. My God! Doesn't it even dawn on him that what goes on tonight is probably their way of convincing themselves they're not slaves, even if only for a little while? They surely would be if they adopted customs contrary to their nature, dictated to them by a narrow-minded society completely ignorant of their culture, scorning it, incapable of accepting anything that's different. (Robinson 353)

⁸³ He believes that his duty is to substitute their ancestral customs with his culture, his beliefs, and his ways. They, in spite of being enslaved, are obstinate and refuse to accept these changes. These gatherings, as well as the language they speak, are a means of showing their opposition, without resorting to violence. The Reverend absolutely refuses to realize that a happy slave who embraces Christianity is a gross misconception. The aim, of course, is to completely obliterate the personality of the black man, and the way things are going, in a few generations it will have been achieved. Working in slavery, obligated to mere survival; the forced acceptance of unfamiliar customs that go against their character; the unforgivable contempt for all they represent and all that they are; to deny them even the

Elizabeth's genuine concern, anger and ignorance of the racial hostilities that exist in their time prompt George to educate her on Brimington's true mission as Reverend on the island of San Andres: to completely eradicate all vestiges of humanity from the enslaved, so that, even after slavery is no longer legal, they will continue to hold a degrading and nonhuman view of themselves. Both George's and Elizabeth's comments display a mode of thinking that is literally centuries ahead of their time in the nineteenth century colonial Latin American and Caribbean setting they inhabit in the novel. While Elizabeth boldly asserts that even post-slavery, the archipelago's African descendants will still continue to be colonized in a cultural and psychological sense, forced to forget and adopt a culture that is not theirs, George essentially foresees the future struggles of the ex-enslaved and their descendants to regain any sense of humanity. Not only are the truth-for-terms of George's and Elizabeth's world clearly revealed, the foundations of prosthetic oppression have also been laid in these conversations. While Reverend Brimington and the small white population on the island of San Andres view the enslaved as stupid and incapable of knowing anything that goes on in the world around them, on the contrary, there are many who know exactly what's going on, what's happening to them, and the religious and cultural conventionalisms that have been imposed upon them to carry out the mission of dehumanizing Blackness. All the while, the enslaved continue to let Brimington and others think that their rituals are complete nonsense, when, as George and Elizabeth both point out, they are really windows into a world of self-affirmation and signs of conspiring humanness, worldmaking, and autonomy within their constructed oppression.

most primitive right to family life. All this, Elizabeth, will turn them into people who have nothing but a feeling of self-degradation. (355)

Similarly, shortly after George and Elizabeth decide to get married, and in the moments before they announce their plans publicly, the now engaged couple have another stern conversation about the state of thinking which they know will bring their community into chaos and disarray once they express their romantic intentions with one another, and the possibility of white culture accepting Afro-descendants as human in some far-off future:

—George, para una aceptación por parte de cualquier grupo, como decía mi padre, el primero que tiene que aceptarse como igual, es el mismo que se deja condenar al desprecio. Tiene que convencerse de que es igual y portarse de esa forma.

—Elizabeth, los esclavos no están condenados únicamente a trabajar sin pago y al desprecio de sus amos, también su libertad de sentirse como seres humanos está prohibida. Claro está... menos en un aspecto: tienen el derecho a adorar al mismo Dios de sus amos y es muy difícil para ellos entender la división en todo lo terrenal.

—‘George’ —decía ella—, ‘sin duda alguna, algunos iremos a la tumba sin lograr cambiar en cuanto a eso la manera de pensar de los menos creativos, los que no logran salirse del molde donde fueron creados. Pero la gran mayoría, los audaces como nosotros, que hemos logrado comprender la ridiculez de esas enseñanzas, escaparemos. Nosotros iniciaremos en la isla una sociedad capaz de distinguir algo más que el color de las personas. Una sociedad que escuchará más de lo que mira.’ (197)⁸⁴

⁸⁴ —As my father used to say, when it comes to acceptance between different groups, the first one to accept similarity to the other is the group that is condemning itself to contempt. They must convince themselves that they are the same, and behave accordingly.

—The slaves aren’t solely condemned to work without pay and be scorned by their masters. Their freedom to feel and live like human beings has also been taken from them. With the exception, of course, that they do have the right to worship the same God as their masters. However, the ignominy and humiliation to which they’re subject to, seem to them to be at odds with what the teachings imply, and that is what they can’t grasp.

—‘Look’, she replied. ‘Some of us will go to our graves without being able to change the way of thinking of the less creative—those who have never been able to escape from the mould they were brought up in. But the bold

In line with their previous conversations, Elizabeth and George once again are used as instruments to declare and attest to the fact that it is not only a matter of outside acceptance, or rather, the acceptance of the African descended enslaved by white humanity, but also the breaking of a self-imposed oppression which makes the enslaved feel that they inherently possess some nonhuman quality that makes them inferior. This is communicated in the first few lines in the dialogue in which Elizabeth comments that the first step to acceptance of one group by another is having the subverted group that “se deja condenar al desprecio” (condemns itself to contempt) accept that they are, in fact, equal to the other group. George agrees with this and concurs that this contempt is not just expressed in the fact that the enslaved are exploited for their labor and meant to work without pay, but furthermore, their freedom to be human is also prohibited. Again, these statements are very bold for the time and they clearly reveal a key element of prosthetic oppression: the process of letting oneself become oppressed by internalizing oppressive and degrading systems of thought towards oneself. Obviously, from colonial times until the present, systems of oppression have been set in place by State powers that effected populations have no power to change directly. However, just as the enslaved successfully navigated their way past their current state of oppression during the night of the ritual, Afro-Colombian women and their “oppressed” allies, such as Robinson, do have the power to see their way beyond their present state of being and imagine new worldviews. Furthermore, one can say that Robinson frames Elizabeth as George’s ally in fighting for a time in which they can be together without the social strain of racial bias. She boldly recognizes that those who do not share the same sentiment of humanity that George and herself do are simply “menos creativos” (less creative), but that the majority of people, including

ones, like us, who understand the absurdity of such doctrine, will escape. We shall be the founders of a society on this island capable of seeing beyond skin colour, a society that will listen rather than watch.’ (397)

themselves, who have come to see the falsity and unreality—as Wynter would say—of the beliefs by which they live will succeed in escaping to create a different way of life. Elizabeth's declarations in this part of the book are quite insightful in regard to thinking in terms of intra-time, conspiratorial time, and story-time. I argue that Elizabeth speaks from a place of conspiratorial time to renegotiate terms of the past in intra-time. In other words, combining official and imagined historical narratives of the Archipelago of San Andres and Providencia with her twenty first century present times, Robinson successfully manages to fuse the past with the present, and the future as well, as she (re)inscribes historical narrative within the present, and also presents a concept that can only be fully accomplished within story-time. For example, Elizabeth ironically says that *the majority* of people on the archipelago are able to see through this false and fabricated worldview. However, as illustrated throughout the novel, this is not true. While there are a few who support Elizabeth and George in their endeavor to start a life together, the vast majority of people on the Island of San Andres, enslaved and white alike, are perturbed by the couple's choice to be together and do not understand their decision. I interpret this comment as Robinson's hope—not just for her archipelago, but for humanity—that future generations will read the book and be able to identify themselves as constituting that ecumenically human majority.

George and Elizabeth not only have to have these conversations amongst themselves. They must also later confront Reverend Birnington and the plantation owners about their intentions, and this is where things get contentious, as well as fantastical. Obviously, Birnington does not respond to the news of their engagement well and tries to convince George and Elizabeth that their union is absolutely impossible and not even fathomable within their colonial time-space. In a moment of controlled resistance and anger, George tells Birnington that:

Usted lo sabe muy bien, hay dos razones que lo han impulsado a comportarse en la forma como lo está haciendo: no ha podido usted arrancar prejuicios y convencionalismos absurdos, estúpidos, crueles y anticristianos de su vida, que nada han contribuido a su felicidad, es más, han acrecentado una inseguridad lamentable y vergonzosa de su personalidad y, por último, como es natural y lógico, su comportamiento obedece a una derrota. Le he ganado la partida. (204)⁸⁵

For this time period, George's victory speech is vastly out of place. It is even a stretch to say that his unique status as *Ñandu* and his more personal relationship to Birmingham constitute factors that give him the power to chastise the reverend this way. I argue that this is yet one more moment in Robinson's novel in which looking through the lens of colonial times or any previously or presently established worldview greatly diminishes the moment. As I have stated above, fantastical might be the word to describe this interaction between a mixed-raced young man who lives between enslaved and free worlds and the white reverend, as we interpret this scene from our current time period. However, Robinson again uses George as a vessel to import humanity into a time period in which he would have had none. As Pinto writes about difficult diasporas, she highlights that the identities and strategies that constitute diaspora itself often come shrouded in mystery and the uncomfortableness of the unknown. *In No Give Up, Maan!* George is that unknown identity and he and Elizabeth together symbolize an even greater threat to their colonial worldview and concept of diaspora in the making. In these lines, Robinson imbues George with a great sense of futuristic foresight, security, and a space to vocalize his resistance to an imposed

⁸⁵ "You're well aware of the reason why you're behaving in this manner. First, you haven't been able to get rid of those absurd, cruel and stupid antichristian prejudices and practices that haven't contributed one iota to your happiness. On the contrary, they've fostered a pitiful insecurity and shame in you. And second, because I've won" (402-403).

identity. By standing up to Birnington, George, now in his own conspiratorial time, sheds his truth-for-terms identity to make way for a new time in which he is included as human. In conspiratorial time, his speech is not fantastical, it is a matter of fact. Just as George declares to Birnington, he has won this game by refusing prosthetic oppression.

Finally, toward the end of the novel, Claudomiro Venecia arrives on the island of San Andres and, as Prefect of New Granada, declares that slavery shall officially be abolished on the archipelago. Robinson uses this moment not as a time of celebration. Rather, she continues to drive home the stark realization that although they legally have been declared free, the enslaved still remain so through a psychological and cultural indoctrination that does not allow them to fully recognize any concept or idea of freedom. Staying far away from a romanticized interpretation of that very instant of abolition, Robinson describes the day as “la tarde más triste de la isla. Les había llegado a los esclavos el permiso de vivir, pero las cicatrices de la esclavitud en sus sentimientos habían llegado tan hondas, petrificadas como el coral que formaba la isla misma, que desconocían el sentimiento que correspondía a la noticia recibida” (217).⁸⁶ As if ceding to the fact that the end has come, after the news is broken, Reverend Birnington collapses and passes away, seemingly from a heart attack. Signaling the end of an era, *Tante* Friday, one of Birnington’s enslaved helpers, holds him in his last moments and sings *Amazing Grace* as both the now free Black citizens of the archipelago and their former enslavers look on in shock and disbelief at the news they just received. The first lines of the hymn serve to close out the novel. Interestingly, in the Spanish edition of the novel, the lyrics to *Oración de Unidad* are used, the Spanish version of *Amazing Grace*. Although in this version, the melody is the same, the meaning of the words is a

⁸⁶ “That afternoon was the saddest one ever witnessed on the island. The slaves had been given their freedom, the permission to live, but the scars of slavery on their souls were so deep, petrified like the coral on the reef, that they weren’t familiar with the sentiment that corresponded to the news they’d just received” (417).

bit different when comparing the lines of the song. In both the English and Spanish versions of the novel, *Tante* Friday sings the hymn in English, however, in the Spanish edition, the lyrics of *Oración de unidad* appear in parentheses:

Amazing Graaace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like meee... Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come...'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home (Tu gracia recibí, dulzura y luz. Yo nunca merecí tanto amor... tardamos en captar el mensaje de amor que tú me enseñaste en la cruz... dos mil años de error, veinte siglos de horror y la verdad triunfó...) (218).⁸⁷

The fact that the last lines of the Spanish version read "...y la verdad triunfó" (and the truth prevailed) is no coincidence. Obviously, read in a religious context, the "truth" refers to God's word. However, within the context of the novel, the truth may have another meaning in which it refers to not only the will of a Christian God that *Tante* Friday and her peers have come to recognize through colonization, but also the truth of their own humanity. Although the future is unknown, with the end of slavery upon them, a new era has started that signals a major change to come in human hierarchies that is centuries in the making. Furthermore, Robinson may have used this particular verse to refer to her upholding the truth of her archipelago through her writing, thus protecting it from erasure. The very title of the book *No give up, Maan!*, acts as a testament to the resilience of the Raizal people, as well as a command to keep breaking barriers to humanity and visibility. Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that Robinson skillfully uses what appears to be a classic love story to (re)inscribe notions of what it means to be human into a historical reflection of her very own Archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia. Just a few years earlier,

⁸⁷ Your grace I received, sweetness and light. I never deserved so much love...we were late to capture the message of love that you taught me on the cross...two thousand years of error, twenty centuries of horror and the truth prevailed."

Úrsula Mena Lozano also wrote the history of her roots through poetry and song, further pushing love as the basis for understanding a growing humanity. In the following section, I will demonstrate how her short study of Afro-Chocoan literature and poetry reveals itself to be a refreshing, yet painfully simple demonstration of how to forge a new sense of being human through the uniting force of love.

6.3 Úrsula Mena Lozano and The Art of Letting Be: Another Form of Love as Theory and Change

Úrsula Mena Lozano's 1995 poetic study, *Indicios para leer el amor en la poesía chocoana*, contains a small collection of poetic works, *alabaos*, plays, and letters from Afro-Colombian writers, as well as Spanish and Cuban artists that have shaped the image of Blackness in Latin America within literature. Mena's collection contains over 45 works that span the 1500s to the late twentieth century, divided in sections to exemplify how Afro-Colombian identity has been reflected in written works during the Spanish colonial period, the age of Romanticism, and the modern and postmodern era of the 20th century. Many of the works are accompanied by historical facts about the authors and their importance to the literary legacy of Chocoan writing and poetry. As Mena states herself in the introduction, the main mission of her book is to pay tribute to poets and writers such as "Manuel Saturio Valencia, César Conto Ferrer, Miguel A. Caicedo Mena, Hugo Salazar Valdés, Rogerio Velásquez M., Teresa Martínez de Varela, Eduardo Ferrer, María Dualiby Maluff, César Rivas Lara, y cientos más" to not only highlight their contributions to Afro-Colombian literature, but also to humanity (7). While some of the writings that appear in *Indicios* have been well-documented in other anthologies and published works,

others were recorded by Mena for the first time in writing, as many of them had only been previously shared orally or had not had the chance to be published, like the poetry of little known María Dualiby Maluff, for example. The Afro-Colombian academic and writer, a native of Chocó, describes the piece as an essay, but given that the majority of the text consists of citing poems and other writings in their entirety, I consider this work a short anthology as well. The other main purpose of Mena's book, besides acting as tribute to Afro-Chocoan writers, is to "presentar unas pistas de cómo, a través de sus tiempos, los descendientes de África en el Chocó, de una u otra forma, le han marcado al afrocolombiano de hoy, la ruta de una cultura que es, en esencia, la cultura de amor, la cultura de la vida" (8).⁸⁸ What is remarkable about Mena's work is not so much the essay itself. In fact, by traditional academic standards, her thesis on tracing how African descendants of the Chocó have created what she defines as a culture of love would probably be classified as weak, not complex enough, or unprovable. However, when looking at *Indicios* from a worldmaking perspective, her lack of commentary and analysis of the works contained in the book signal an attempt to let the artists' creations speak for themselves on building a separate worldview based on love. I argue that, in doing so, Mena disrupts our current worldview and proposes new ways of affective theorizing simultaneously linked to the past, present, and future in two major ways: through her (re)inscribing of history from an image of Blackness as well as whiteness, and proposing love not just as a standalone emotion, but also as a link to the discovery of an unknown future, which reflects itself within the largely unanalyzed writing contained in *Indicios*.

⁸⁸ "present some clues on how, through time, descendants of Africa in Chocó, in one way or another, have marked the Afro-Colombian of today, the route of a culture that is, in essence, the culture of love, the culture of life."

First, Mena uses her introduction to establish the process through which, by constant comparison with Europeans, people of African descent were negatively dehumanized and served as a constant reminder of white superiority. She uses this as a segue to discuss one of the most prominent traditions in Afro-Chocoan orality: the *alabao*. Noting that this form of poetry originated through the “adoctrinamiento de descendientes africanos,”⁸⁹ namely through the imposition of Catholicism on African slaves and the suppression of their own religious beliefs, the author goes on to highlight the beauty and significance that has resulted from this unique imitation of catholic hymns (11). Mena goes into more detail about the structure of *alabaos* and gives examples. She then describes the representation of Blackness through theater during the Renaissance, the first medium through which, according to Mena, the Black subject was discussed. Again, she highlights how the representation or featuring of Black characters in theater largely served a negative purpose, highlighting their inability to speak Spanish properly or lack of education. Interestingly, she highlights how dramaturgs such as Lope de Vega and Andrés de Claramonte wrote about the unique characteristics of Black subjects, such as their constant happy demeanor and talent for dancing and singing. In hindsight, these “positive” characteristics are highly inaccurate and further stereotyped people of African descendants. However, I do understand Mena’s point that in comparison to what was usually written about *el negro*, these depictions represented a change in discourse. Obviously, for fellow academics who have studied the depiction of Blackness and the syncretism, appropriations, and adaptations that took place between subjects of African descent and Europeans during colonial times, as well as the resulting descriptions of this subject matter through art, this information on interpretations of Blackness is not new. Nevertheless, what is intriguing about Mena’s study, and particularly these initial sections, is her

⁸⁹ “Indoctrination of African descendants.”

emphasis on comparison and the desire to trace this culture of love all the way back to Africa. If this is a book about Afro-Chocoan poetry, why spend so much space reproducing Spanish colonial mentions of the Black subject and the *mulata* and instead jump to a time period in which Afro-Chocoans began producing their own poetry and discuss this in further detail? I argue that Mena's strategy of discussing the Spanish colonial depiction of Blackness through written works of this period serves to broaden the horizons of the author's investigation from a study on Latin American Blackness to one of humanness as she delves into the function of comparison and civilization, two key factors in the making of the human according to Wynter.

In a 2000 interview with Joyce E. King, when asked about "what Africa can still offer us," Wynter replies:

The West has always been arguing about 'civilization' because it has always had the belief system that to be 'human' is to be 'civilized.' Civilization is a far later and derivative form of the first mechanisms of what Africa offers us. When we go back to Africa—Egypt is wonderful and I am not putting it down—but the great, the dazzling moment is when you go back 50,000 years ago, you are seeing the first manifestations of the techniques by means of which the human is producing and instituting itself as human. I am suggesting that we should be able to see there the fundamental rules that still govern us today. That is what Africa has to offer. It is a tremendous challenge because this is to say that we make ourselves human through words, through meanings, through institutions. We are not interested in what I call the 'I got a shoe, you got a shoe,' mentality: 'You got a civilization, I got a civilization.' Rather, it is the way in which in Africa we can say an 'other' exists to what the West calls human. When you are looking at Voudun, we are seeing an 'other' to what the monotheistic religions have called human. We are going back to our very origin

as humans and the processes of hominization and that is to me what Africa has to offer, when we look at it this way. (“Black Education” 364)

Wynter is making the point that from the very start of civilization, one can trace the process of humanization because, essentially, they go hand and hand with each other and also play off of one another. Thousands of years ago in Africa, people were defining humanity, building societies and marking territories of the human and nonhuman. We may never know what that original human looked like, but what is decipherable is how that form of the human transformed into another, and thus became an “other” to what humanity and civilization look like within our current truth-for-terms. By placing Africa as one of the earliest origins of Afro-Chocoan poetry, as well as choosing to thoroughly highlight the process through which people of African descent were made other, nonhuman or, at the very least, differentiated from European society, culture, and ways of being (as Mena highlights with some Spanish playwrights) she further opens up a context of humanity in which to discuss Blackness. Rather than choosing to exclude white narratives on African descendants, she hones in on those elements of comparison, differentiation, dehumanization, and Africa as the root of the establishment of humanity—in the form of love—to construct a Black human through written works. In this way, Mena reinscribes Afro-Chocoan history and literature as made for humanity, not just to be categorized for a particular ethnicity or genre.

Furthermore, I argue that Mena describes love as a seed for many other emotions and forms of life to flourish to suggest a possible future route for humanity, which on the contrary, is currently used to keep certain populations away from humanness. In our current worldview, one form of humanity cancels out another, but according to Mena, love has an endless multiplying effect that produces and diversifies while allowing its different forms to coexist peacefully. Specifically, Mena attests:

sobresaliendo entre todos los temas, entre todos los motivos de inspiración de los poetas y escritores, el universal tema del amor. Amor a Dios, a la naturaleza, a la raza, a la familia; pero en su mayoría, el amor en el hombre y la mujer, por el hombre y la mujer. De este se desprenden mil motivos más: La búsqueda, la esperanza, los fracasos, los éxitos, los juegos, las decepciones y tantos más. (53)

Keeping with her style of letting these works simply be, expressing themselves without imposing her own analysis, she goes on to show an example of this worldview-shattering love with a poem entitled Canción Decimocuarta by Rogerio Velázquez:

Canción Décimocuarta

Amor: [sic]eres mi lámpara!
Quién me entregó esta espina
[sic]Este dulce licor que es una llaga?

[sic]Tú, que eres la fiebre en mi palabra!

Este junco tan largo de mi dicha
[sic]Quién me lo hizo canción sobre el alma?
Quién me encendió en el pecho
Este dolor que es gozo y me embriaga

[sic]Tú, que eres mi lágrima!

[sic]Amor, eres mi lámpara!

Fourteenth Song

Love: you are my lamp!
Who gave me this thorn
This sweet liquor that is a sore?

You, who are the fever in my word!

This long reed of my bliss
Who made it a song on my soul?
Who ignited within my chest
This pain that is joy and intoxicates me

You, who are my tear!

Love, you are my lamp!

Moving from one of the most popular poets in Chocóan letters to one whose works have gone largely unnoticed and unpublished, Mena also includes the work of María Dualiby Maluff, whose writing she interprets as “un marco de soledades o de largas esperas.” (60)⁹⁰:

⁹⁰ “A framework of loneliness or long waits.”

Cansancio

Mi vida es como barca sin brújula vencida
Que lleva entre martirios el dolor de no verte,
Cuando apenas creía reanudar la partida,
Agotó más esfuerzos el temor de perderte.

Y toda la jornada perdida entre las nieblas
Con la total entrega en común de ideales,
Sólo algunos vestigios de ni noche tinieblas
Y estos surcos de espinos de mis muertos rosales.

Y con este cansancio voy mezclando paisajes
Van pasando las horas con su horizonte incierto,
De zozobra en zozobra con vaivenes de oleajes
Voy buscando tu oasis mi amargo desierto.

Por sentirte tan lejos hacia ti va mi canto
Desde el silencio mismo de mi triste recodo.
Quisiera sorprenderte buscándome en el llanto
Por los mismo [sic] caminos que nos vieron todos.

Me dirás que no sientes. Me dirás que no olvidas
Esta amargura insólita con tañidos de lira.
Que entrelazan las horas en dolor repartidos
(También en los sueños febriles se delira)

Por ti que no has podido triunfar de lo salvaje,
Mi barca que te lleva mis suspiros a solas.
Era el mar de la vida sin timón ni viraje,
Olvidada de todos a merced de las olas.

Exhaustion

My life is like a boat without an expired
compass
That carries between martyrdoms the pain of
not seeing you,
When I just thought I was resuming the game,
The fear of losing you exhausted more efforts.

And the whole day lost in the mists
With the total common delivery of ideals,
Only some vestiges of not even dark night,
And these thorny furrows of my dead rose
bushes.

And with this exhaustion I am mixing
landscapes
The hours go by with their uncertain horizon
From anxiety to anxiety with swinging swells
I'm looking for your oasis my bitter desert.

For feeling you so distant towards you goes
my song
From the very silence of my sad message.
I would like to surprise you looking for me in
tears
By the same paths that all saw us

You will tell me that you do not feel. You will
tell me that you do not forget
This unusual bitterness with the ringing of the
lyre.
That intertwine the hours in pain distributed
(Also in feverish dreams one raves)

For you who have not been able to triumph
from the wild,
My boat that brings to you my solitary sighs.
It was the sea of life without a rudder or
turning point,
Forgotten by all at the mercy of the waves.

Mena let's these poems demonstrate the plethora of emotions that emanate from love. While Velázquez writes about a love that is so deep that it hurts, Dualiby creates a scene of pure solitude, pain, and longing that evokes a profound sense of exhaustion. Perhaps it is no mistake that Mena does not indicate the year in which these works were written (in the case of Dualiby, this fact may remain unknown). These poems emit a sense of timelessness that further bears witness to the time-

travelling quality of Afro-Colombian art, and thus, it's ability to conceive of new conceptualizations of the human within our current worldview by tapping into the largely uncharted territory of love-as-theory. Mena fittingly concludes her book with a quote from the Brothers Grimm: "...Aquel que tome el veneno se sumirá en el sueño profundo de la muerte y sólo despertará con un beso de la persona amada' (de la tradición germánica). Los hermanos Grimm confirman al amor como la razón de la vida. Eso lo han sabido los poetas y siempre, de ello, han dejado constancia. Para nuestra fortuna." (86).⁹¹

Both Robinson and Mena artfully demonstrate what it means to (re)inscribe not just Afro-Colombian history—but also the histories of the African Diaspora—across two separate literary styles. Contrary to literary texts that attempt to reimagine or re-envision artistic mediums through complex theoretical lenses, these two authors' works live under the radar as complete but simple (re)imaginings of official history and historical texts in order to insert new ways of thinking, being, and knowing into our current worldview. By doing so, they signal the intersectionalities of what we recognize as past, present, and future to reveal the complexities of what I have deemed intra-time, conspiratorial time, and story-time. These temporal realms constantly intertwine with each other and contain no finite beginning, middle, or end, vehemently suggesting a time-oriented elasticity that allows for alternate images of the human to be created. Lastly, Robinson's work importantly puts into question the truth-for-terms of the dissimilarities, contrasts and oppressions that permeate relations between Blackness, like the cultural tensions that exist between the Raizal population of San Andres and Providencia and mainland Afro-Colombians, while Mena's work highlights how Afro-Colombian women's artistry can and must peacefully collaborate with their

⁹¹ "He who takes the poison will plunge into the deep sleep of death and will only awaken with a kiss from the loved one (from the Germanic tradition).' The Brothers Grimm confirm love as the reason for life. Luckily, the poets have known this and have always recorded it."

male counterparts to create not just a Black feminist perspective of life, but a human one. What is most impressive of all is that this is done through and by love, which demonstrates that it is not just well-established academic theories that have the power to explain and reconfigure complicated ideas. Sometimes, the most powerful theory comes in the form of letting emotions lead, allowing the art to speak for itself, and thinking outside of the confines of our present state of being.

7.0 Conclusions: Healing (?) through the Unknown

Quiero sanar las heridas de mi alma
quiero vivir libre

Cynthia Montaña⁹²

Clearly, Blackness and being are not about survival; they are about transformations.
Anything else is nothingness

Patricia D. Fox⁹³

As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, Afro-Colombian women's art is so much more than a tool of protest against the injustices that Afro-Colombian communities all over the world are living in these moments. They are tools of positive transformation that give us unprecedented insight and power to imagine the world differently, to imagine a space in which the human includes all of us. Through music, film, and literature we have seen how Afro-Colombian women and their allies manifest interpretations of the human through their artwork. Although we may not understand it now, there is an intense hope that one day, humanity will be brave enough to shed its opaque nature, see through the (un)reality, and create the ecumenically human with these valuable devices. As scholar Patricia Fox reminds us, Blackness and being are not just tools of survival, as our current worldview would have us believe. Rather, they are a series of transformations. I argue that within these transformations, there are so many possibilities, unknowns, shades of nothingness, and somethingness, official histories and dreams, that it

⁹² "I want to heal the wounds of my soul/I want to live free." Lyrics from Cynthia Montaña's song "Quiero sanar," which appear on the artists album *Ideas*. The full lyrics can be found here: <https://www.cancioneros.com/lyrics/song/2094660/quiero-sanar-cynthia-montano>

⁹³ *Blackness and Being in Latin America: Uprootedness and Improvisation* (171).

becomes essential to become comfortable with not having all the answers and to live in the unknown until it becomes known to us, if it ever truly allows itself to be revealed.

The concept of (re)voicing, (re)viewing and (re)inscribing, then, is a never-ending process of making and unmaking that leaves room for all of the unknowns in between where anything and everything remains in potentiality. I understand that the theoretical openness which I have displayed in this dissertation may lead to the question of how a concrete healing process can take place through the mission of creating new worlds, especially if there is no way of knowing when this new world will be ready, complete, or active for the majority of the population. One thing that I would like to emphasize in this conclusion is that the healing is in the creation of this new worldview, and not necessarily in the completion of it. Healing, respect, peace, and humanness inevitably look different to every human, and thus in the art that is created, whether consciously or unconsciously, each subject may find in this art something distinct that triggers a process of healing and feeling whole. Therefore, literature, film, and music are the perfect vehicle through which one can find their own source of repair and reflection of humanness through the creation or consumption of these different artistic mediums. Although it can be unsettling to plant a theory with so many roots, a complicated, partially unexplained time-space, and no clear results (we may never be sure of what these healing processes look like, or how they truly manifest within people), I have argued that this uncertainty is exactly what is needed to start the process of dismantling our current concept of Man. The unknown challenges what we think we know, and forces us to think differently, not only about ourselves and our future, but about how we conceive of intellectuality and think about our past. It is my hope that this healing through art started by Afro-Colombian women artists will also translate to academia. Specifically, the type of open and emotionally driven theory produced and shared in this project can act as a useful tool to expand the bounds of

academia beyond Western-cultivated concepts and standards of what constitutes legitimate, useable, and effective theory in the first place. As Wynter implies in her scholarship, the process of bringing a new worldview to fruition is not possible if we wait for the answers to come to us. We must be the ones brave enough to forge the path. Due to the fact that one dissertation can only cover so much, making its scope limited, and also keeping in mind that building a new world and a new human takes a village, there are many things that I have not gotten the chance to delve into more that should be expanded on in the future, if not by me, then by others, to elaborate this line of scholarship. I see my dissertation as an open invitation to further build upon the concepts and theories expressed in this project.

First, one facet that I did not have the resources to expand on was the reality that there are, in fact, several Afro-Colombias, and not just one. Although I briefly cover this in my project and incorporate artists that go beyond the geographies of the Colombian Pacific region, it is very clear that more scholarship needs to be done on other Afro-Colombian populations who 1) live in different regions of Colombia and 2) live outside of Colombia entirely. The lack of scholarship covering other Afro-Colombian populations is disappointing to say the least. This underdeveloped chunk of investigation and research is imperative to growing scholarship on Afro-Colombian art and the human. Without these diverse and diverging perspectives, it will remain extremely difficult to go beyond current perspectives of the Afro-Colombian-as-nonhuman and as-scholarship. What happens when the Afro-Colombian subject goes beyond the reach of ancestral knowledges, is separated from its seemingly natural setting of the thick, humid jungles of the Colombian lowlands, and is affected by a completely different set of problems dictated by their present urban, foreign, or some other distinct environment? Surely, if these experiences were to be documented, it would plant the seeds for a rich and varied ground for healing and expanded humanness.

Secondly, in seeking to further develop this project, the study of Afro-Colombian art must be broadened as well. Specifically, more types of art—and its impact on the creation of new worldviews and the creation of Wynter’s human—should be studied. Since this project was conducted without the opportunity for field research, there was no chance for me to study art in-person. Therefore, the influence that art installations, graffiti, street performances, live plays and poetry readings—or any other form of art—may have had on this particular project will remain unknown. For example, in the summer of 2018, I travelled to Bogotá, Colombia for an academic conference and stayed in the neighborhood of Chapinero Alto. Close to my AirBnB were some walls splashed with colorful graffiti art. One of the walls depicted portraits of Black children, gleefully smiling and holding their hands over their mouth, as if trying to hold in laughter. I remembered wondering whether this graffiti might serve the current dissertation prospectus I was working on and considered taking a picture. Then I stopped myself, concluding that the scope of my budding project would not be wide enough to incorporate an analysis of graffiti art as well, and therefore, it was not worth taking a moment of my time to archive the art. I regret not having taken the picture, realizing now that there were so many insightful questions and answers that could have blossomed by acknowledging the work as a voice of ontological invention and new worldviews. Who was the artist behind the graffiti and why did they choose this location for their artistic expression? In other words, what were these Black children doing on the walls of an affluent neighborhood in Bogotá? Was this another attempt by Colombia’s capital to continue the ruse of a pluriethnic Colombia, or something different, or even both? That is, perhaps, for someone else to find out.

Lastly, another concept that needs more attention is the notion of conspiratorial time, intra-time and story-time as a phase of existence that is distinct from yet parallel to this current

worldview. It is somewhat difficult to further develop this schema of time, since my point surrounding this topic is that this current worldview is still evolving and, in this stage, cannot be fully formed. However, it still remains vital to further consider the possible innovations and restraints of thinking of the world in terms of conspiratorial time, intra-time, and story-time, as well as how it compares with other time-spaces and worldviews related to Blackness, being, and the human. Although I have outlined some existing alternative theories on time in this project, there are many more that I did not include or have no knowledge of that could inform the direction of this new realm of time that I have proposed.

While my dissertation is not meant to be an exhaustive, comprehensive, or authoritative analysis on Afro-Colombian women's art and the human, I am hopeful that it will be seen as a catalyst to new ways of thinking about the potential of Afro-Colombian women's creativity as more than a vehicle of protest against government forces and prosthetic oppression. Instead, this art is a valuable expression of power that has the potential to completely change how we view the world and pushes for ways to eliminate dichotomies of "us" and "them." Furthermore, it affords one the power to crawl out of the space of oppression crafted for nonhuman populations, giving this agency to present generations, while also establishing an unbreakable link to the past and the future where these times and the people in them are fluid, transparent, alive, and awaiting freedom. Although the world in which we live may truly never relinquish the power to divide and destroy as the fight for human supremacy and dominance continues, at least we know that, for all the hurting nonhumans, if we are really willing to take "the true leap" as Wynter calls it, into "introducing invention into existence," then the creativity and endless possibilities of artistry, with our minds as the canvas, are tools of escape that open a space for a future that—even if only

imagined—allow us to live out our full and free human potential, aspire to the greatest of heights, and achieve our wildest dreams (Wynter “Unsettling” 331).

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